

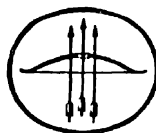
HOUSE OF SECRETS

The story starts in Marseilles, on the terrace of a café. At that stage Wright Hughey is still the 'irascible, slave-driving, whisky-drinking, first officer of the *Sarah V. Lovejoy*.' From that point on it is all surprises and any summary of what happens would give them away. We will only say, therefore, that before he's had time to say 'cute little blonde!' he finds himself in Paris and in the thick of one of the thickest plots in the whole history of international crookery. He is on the right side, of course, though he often wonders why; and against him is one of the most convincing organizations of big-time crime that has ever baffled the international police, ranging from a shoemaker with strange sidelines, to Madame Ballu, whose bathmats are made of mink.

House of Secrets.

by

STERLING NOEL



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For
ROBERT BUCKNER
who rearranged the chromosomes

I

We'd been held up in Marseilles for three days by a tug-boat strike. We were loaded to the water-line with some nine thousand tons of assorted cargo, all the hatches were battened, and San Francisco was waiting for us on the other side of the world. But no tugs were operating, and the rusting pile of triple-expansion junk in our engine room didn't have the power to blow the lid off a teapot, to say nothing of manœuvring us out of the Marseilles harbour without assistance. So we sat at the dock, paying exorbitant wharfage, running up a bill that looked like a government handout to the farmers of Cambodia, and stewing in our midsummer juices. By we, I mean the ship and its company and its irascible, slave-driving, whisky-drinking captain, Luke Eversole. But not, by any means, the first officer, likewise an irascible, slave-driving, whisky-drinking character with the somewhat impossible name of Wright Hughey, who is me.

No, I was on the town. I was sick of the *Sarah V. Lovejoy* and her dirty iron works; in fact I was pretty much fed up with all of the seven seas, at that point. So I was seeking solace in the bars and resorts along the Canebière. Three days of solace had reduced my bankroll to a lonely ten-spot and I was nearing the end of a good thing with only a few pleasant memories and a king-sized hangover for my trouble. I was wandering back to a big café named the Solferino, where they would change my last ten dollars into francs at a fair black market rate, when a small, dark type suddenly came out of the crowd to my side and said in bad English, 'Why didn't you let us know you were here?'

'Didn't know it myself,' I replied. Then I laughed at my

own joke, feeble as it was, and moved on. I turned around once, a few paces on, and he was standing there looking after me as though I'd just broken his kiddie-car. So what did it mean? Nothing, absolutely nothing. And yet that small, unimportant incident was the beginning of something as big as living or dying. It must have been the beginning, as I look back upon it now, because it was the first of a series of events that made little sense but that, as they accumulated, finally put me on a tightrope stretched between the underworld and oblivion. That may sound melodramatic, but it's only a dim echo of the reality.

Well, I got to the Solferino, changed my ten dollars, and was sitting on the terrace in a corner with a *pastis* in front of me, deciding where to go next. It was late afternoon and the café was filling up with *apéritif* drinkers. There was a cute one at the table next to mine, a neat little blonde with a fairly good fur coat and nothing but contempt for my tentative glance of invitation. I'd spotted her as a *poule-de-luxe* at first, then decided I was wrong; that she was somebody's wife or girl friend, waiting for her man. You can be awfully wrong about those girls in France, but, of course, you can be awfully right, too.

Along about then, Luke Eversole came staggering along the sidewalk with the look on his ugly bird-dog face of hunting for someone. By staggering, I don't mean drunk, although it's very unlikely that he hadn't lapped up his fifth of scotch by that time of the day. Luke always staggered when he got his feet on the uncertain solidity of dry land. He was a blue-water man strictly, and anything he walked upon that didn't heave and pitch made for precarious going!

I gave him a hail and he came lurching to my table and sank tiredly into a chair. The blonde gave him a big sneer.

'My stomach's killing me,' he said. 'Where the hell you been?'

'Around. You want a drink?'

'Well, just one for the medicinal properties. I think I've got ulcers. Must be ulcers. That little stevedore boss says the strike will be over this evening. We sail as soon as we get a tug. I figure on midnight. I can't find that damned agent anywhere. You seen him?'

'Last night. Not since.' I got a waiter and ordered a double scotch and water for the captain and another *pastis* for myself. A shadow kept bothering me. It would come and go, come and go. I turned around and looked at a sharp *maquereau* type pacing at the side of the terrace. I was sensitive and jumpy from my hangover and the look of him annoyed me. He was obviously looking me over, and when he saw that he had attracted my attention, he smiled at me, nodded, and walked quickly away.

Incident No. 2. What the hell was the matter with the people of Marseilles? Or more to the point, what the hell was the matter with me?

'You going to sail with us, Mr Hughey?' asked the captain with what he considered to be elaborate sarcasm. He was a lovable old man indeed.

The waiter was putting his drink on the table and I gave him one of my newly acquired franc notes.

'I might go along for the ride, Mr Eversole,' I said. 'And to keep you company, of course. Maybe that whisky will sweeten your disposition.'

He glared at me briefly, then stuck his nose into his glass. I looked at the blonde's legs and decided they were very nice. She hunched a shoulder disdainfully and turned her head away from me. Two men stopped at the corner of the terrace and looked for a moment in our direction. One of them was the *maquereau*, who had been pacing a few moments before, and he nodded at me again when I looked at him. The other was taller, more heavily built, and had the dark skin and hooked nose of a Levantine. His eyes were large and black and moist, and seemed very unhappy.

'I'll expect you aboard by eight o'clock,' said Eversole, looking gloomily into his now empty glass. 'And you'd better mend your ways, Mr Hughey, if you want to sail with me.'

'Yes, sir,' I said. 'Why argue with the old bore? 'Will you have some more medicine, sir?'

He nodded his head in assent and I looked around for the waiter. When I'd signalled to him and turned my head back, the Levantine was standing beside the table, bending over slightly and, apparently, examining my face. Eversole was smiling at him in a silly way as though he knew him. The eternal miasma of his mind made recognition of the familiar an uncertain thing with him. Usually, for instance, he called me Greentree, which was the name of the mate who had preceded me.

The Levantine suddenly pulled an empty chair around and sat down next to me. He nodded pleasantly to Eversole, then nudged me with an arm. 'So, you got here,' he said in precise English.

I looked him over carefully and could find no menace in him. He seemed to be friendly – just a guy who had made a mistake.

'You know me?' I asked him.

That seemed to be an insult, a personal affront. He drew back and regarded me as though he were going to cry. Then the waiter came and leaned over between us and put Eversole's new drink on the table. I noticed that the blonde was looking in our direction with a faint flicker of interest. Well, maybe.

The waiter left. Eversole raised his glass to the Levantine. 'Mud in your eye,' he said, then swallowed more than half of it.

The Levantine nodded at him, then turned back to me. 'You ask me that!' he exclaimed. 'But don't be angry, sir. We are waiting for next week.'

'Next week!' roared Eversole, slamming his glass on the

table. 'I won't stand for it, sir!' Tonight, do you hear? Tonight!'

The Levantine was alarmed. He put a placating hand on the captain's arm. 'You won't have to wait until tonight,' he said. 'Just a little time more. My man will be right back.'

The captain lurched suddenly to his feet, knocking his glass to the concrete where it shattered with a bright tinkle. 'I'll go back aboard, then,' he said to me. 'You finish this business here, then come a-running.' He made the edge of the terrace without further damage and staggered off down the Canebière hunting for a taxi.

Well, it didn't make sense. None of it made sense. Eversole obviously had construed the Levantine's words as concerning the strike and its end. I hadn't got around to construing them at all. I was suspended in the midst of my hangover, between reality and my dream world, and everything about me was moving with a slow deliberation that was not unpleasant. I finished my *pastis* and looked at my companion, who was now regarding me with a puzzled frown.

'Who is that man?' he demanded, leaning towards me.

Suddenly I'd had enough of him. The *pastis* was doing its work and I was getting back to earth fast. 'Scram,' I said. 'You've been around too long.'

'We are perfectly safe,' he said urgently, leaning closer and blowing a rich aroma of garlic in my face. 'I have men watching in each direction.'

'Scram anyway, I've had enough of you,' I said, raising my voice a bit.

He got up slowly then, his eyes flashing with anger. He started to lean towards me, to make another protest, I suppose, and I gave him a hard push. He ended up against the blonde's table, nearly upsetting it in her lap. Fortunately, she was holding her drink in her hand. She steadied the Levantine with her other hand and said something to him in a low voice that I didn't catch. He came back

towards me with what 'was supposed to be dangerous stealth. People all around us were looking in our direction, and those farther away were standing to get a better view. Off near the café entrance three waiters were pushing their way through the crowd, headed in our direction. It looked like we were going to have a fight. Well, why not? I'd had nearly everything else Marseilles had to offer.

I stayed in my chair. It's an old bar-room trick, to keep low so you can get under your adversary's guard. I expected him to draw a knife, at least, and then I could come up to him hard. But all he did was to come within arm's reach, stop dramatically, and point a finger at my nose.

'Hannakin won't forget,' he announced softly. 'Now there will be trouble.'

The waiters reached us by then and stopped in the small clearing, looking disappointedly from the Levantine to me. One of them made a remark to the blonde and she laughed. I smiled at the Levantine and motioned with my thumb. 'Get going,' I told him. The waiters started to withdraw. The *maquereau* suddenly came threading his way among the tables to the Levantine's side. He had a package in his hands, about the size of a double shoe box. The Levantine snatched it from him, advanced to my table, and slammed it down in front of me, making the glasses and saucers bounce.

'There it is!' he said, his voice cracking with hysteria. 'Don't come back to Marseilles!'

He hurried the *maquereau* from the terrace, talking excitedly to him in French, evidently complaining about me. I looked after them for a moment, then looked down at the package. I felt it tentatively. It was solid. Maybe it was a shoe box. Just what I needed, a couple of pairs of shoes!

I glanced around and everyone was minding his own business except the blonde. She offered me a very small

sample of a smile, then tapped her head with a finger. Did she mean me or the Levantine? Well, one of us was certainly crazy. I got the waiter and ordered another *pastis*, then untied the string from the box. The paper around it was sealed with enough glue and sealing wax to last a week at the bottom of Marseilles harbour. I got a corner of it going, finally, and then ripped it off. There was a box underneath, but it didn't look like shoes. Bonbons, I'd say, but a lot of them. There was more sealing wax and glue around the cover, and I took out my knife and started to work on it. Blondie was still interested, but was definitely slipping away from me. I didn't get even a sample of a smile on that round. I went to work on the cover again. The waiter came with my *pastis* and was putting it on the table, when the cover suddenly jumped off with all the perversity of inanimate objects and the box slipped out of my clumsy hands. Its contents were spilled over a wide area of terrace. People looked around. The waiter stared. There were a dozen loud gasps, not the least of all the one that came from my own wide open mouth. The box had been packed full of brand-new money! English money! English money, it looked like to me.

Well, everybody helped. A young Frenchman and his pretty girl, an old party with a beaver, a fat housewife and her young daughter who tried to stash a bill and got slapped by mama; the waiter, and the blonde were all on their knees gathering up the loot. They came and put it all on the table, with various expressions of sympathy and envy, oos and ahs, *alors* and *quelle richesse!* and I arranged it back in the box. And then, when the excitement had subsided and it was all neatly stowed and the people were back to their drinks, but still mumbling about me, who do you think I had for company at my table? Right. The blonde! And there was nothing small about her smile now, or her interest. Money, I would suppose, makes the whole world kin. Or at least friendly.

'What a surprise!' she exclaimed happily. Her accent was frightful, but what difference could that make?

'Yes, wasn't it?' I agreed. I handed her one of the notes. 'You know what that is?' I asked.

She took it and felt it and cooed at it. 'But of course, *monsieur*. My mother once had many of them. Five-quid note.' She sighed and looked off into the distance. 'You should have known my mother, *monsieur*,' she said.

'Is it any good?'

'*Mais bien sûr!* It is not legal today to have so many, but then, few things are legal any more.'

'You know where we can get them changed?'

'That is easy. I will show you.'

'Fine. You will help me spend a few of them?'

She took my arm and snuggled up to me. 'I will love that,' she murmured.

'I will use this many,' I said, taking ten notes from the box. 'Just the normal percentage for handling and wear and tear. The rest we'll give to the police.'

She was horrified. 'But why the police, *monsieur*?'

'Because,' I replied, 'they're not mine.'

We got up and left the terrace after I had paid the waiter. I carried the box under one arm and the blonde hung on to the other. She led me up the Canebière a block and then into a maze of narrow side streets. She seemed preoccupied, and I caught her giving me little worried glances every now and then. She stopped me in front of a huge double-door facing a small square. She put her hands on her hips and looked at me belligerently.

'You will not go to the police,' she announced.

I smiled at her. She was very cute. 'No? Why not?'

'I know of that man who gave you the money,' she said. 'He will kill you.'

'Who is he?' I asked.

She shrugged. She clammed up completely about him. 'Just don't go to the police,' she warned.

'What will you do?' I asked her.

'I will leave you flat,' she replied.

'And you will tell him?'

'Yes. Do you think I want to get my throat cut?'

'All right,' I said. 'The police can wait. Let's live a little.'

She gave me a long, doubtful look, then finally turned from me and pushed a button beside the door. It was opened presently by a uniformed attendant who greeted the blonde with formal recognition, and we were admitted into a small court. The attendant led the way to a door in the building on the left and opened it for us. We entered into a large lobby with a beautiful chandelier overhead and a huge painting of a reclining nude toying with a pink veil on the right wall. Directly ahead were double mahogany doors guarded by a small, dark man in dinner clothes. A pretty little girl with a dress cut too low and a skirt too brief, but with the proper equipment to be thus attired, took my hat. I gave her the box of money, too, and told her not to open it. She grinned at me and opened it for a fast peek. The blonde growled a harsh warning to her, and she closed it fast. Then Blondie grabbed it out of her hands and tucked it under her arm. The hat-check girl walked away with as much dignity as such clothes would permit.

'You should not have done that,' said the blonde.

'What's the difference? Where are we now?'

'Come, I will show you.'

I followed her through the mahogany door, which was opened by the attendant, and we found ourselves in a huge gambling salon, the walls beautifully draped, a thick carpet on the floor, and three glittering, cut-glass chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. There was a huge *chemin-de-fer* table in the centre of the room, and roulette layouts flanking it. There was a long buffet spread at one end of the room and the cash desk at the other. Five men and one woman were playing a listless game of *chemin-*

de-fer and two women were playing at one of the roulette tables. The room had the subdued but expectant air of waiting for people to arrive.

The blonde led me to the cash desk, presided over by a large, henna-haired dame in a black dress and with a black velvet choker around her neck. I took the ten banknotes from my pocket and the blonde lifted them gently from my hand and presented them to the woman. There was a short series of questions and answers in rapid French which escaped me entirely, then the blonde nodded and the woman dug into her cash drawer and came up with a huge packet of 10,000 franc notes. She peeled off five, so fast that it seemed impossible she had counted them, and pushed them towards my companion. Blondie picked them up carefully, counted them with deliberation, then handed them to me. It didn't seem like very much, compared to that bundle in the cash drawer.

Blondie must have read my thoughts. 'You could use these,' she suggested, holding up the box.

'No,' I told her firmly, 'I am an honest man. Honesty is the best policy. Thou shalt not steal. It says so in the Bible.'

She shook her head at me. 'I think you are, maybe, nuts,' she said.

She took my arm and we walked to the *chemin-de-fer* table, stopping at a vacant place to watch the play. There were about 50,000 francs in the bank and the dealer was just putting his hand on the box to give the woman player her first card.

'Banco,' I said.

Blondie inhaled sharply, digging her fingers into my arm. I looked down at her and she was gnawing on a knuckle. She wouldn't look at me.

The dealer dealt cards to me and to himself. He turned his over. An ace and a seven.

'Have a look,' I told her. She shook her head, then suddenly thrust out her hand and flipped the cards over.

There was a queen and a nine. She sighed and smiled at me. The dealer pushed the contents of the bank to me with his stick, and I tossed him a thousand-franc note. He thanked me and dealt to the other players. Blondie kept a tight hold on my arm. It felt good. I waited until there was 100,000 francs in the bank, then repeated my banco. A ten and a nine next time, and Blondie remained a little more relaxed. She turned my cards over without my asking. I gave the dealer 3,000 francs.

We stayed there an hour and I couldn't lose. The worst hand I drew was a king and a seven. It was phenomenal, and word had passed around the casino so that we now had a good crowd at the table. Many people had come in, of course, but all of the other games were deserted. I had nearly two million francs in front of me, and Blondie was so excited that she was cooing at me like a pigeon.

There was one hard-looking type with red hair who had come in shortly after I started playing and who bucked me on most of the bancos. He seemed to take a personal resentment at my streak of luck and glared at me constantly even when he was not the loser. I asked Blondie who he was and she said he was a *délateur*, whatever that is. She had put the box of pound notes on the table in front of her, and towards the end of my play, when I was reaching out to pick up a pot, I knocked the lid off. I saw the red-head give a start as he glimpsed what we had in the box. Then suddenly, after the next hand, he got up and left. I was glad to see him go, I thought no more about him. Within ten minutes Blondie and I were on our way out, too. She had suggested that we go to her apartment, where she'd cook us dinner. Right at that moment, I felt that I'd never had a better offer, and I wasn't a bit hungry.

So we left that place, with my pockets bulging with francs and with the box jammed with five-quid notes. And we were going to Blondie's apartment. You tell me what more could happen to a sailor! No, *I'll tell you.*

The attendant opened the lobby door for us and we were in the courtyard.) Blondie suddenly stopped and looked up at me. There was no doubt at all what was next. I kissed her. I put one arm around her because I had the box in the other. She put both her arms around me and she held me tight and close. And I was kissed in such a way that, well – let us say that was at least two million francs' worth of affection in it, which is the truth and I'm a no-good cynic.

When that chore had been taken care of, we went through the courtyard door into the street – and right into the arms of the law.

There were two gendarmes and two plain-clothes men waiting for us, with two cars parked at the curb. They were polite, firm, and efficient. They snapped handcuffs on me before I knew what was happening, and one of the plain-clothes men relieved me of my box. Then Blondie, who started to protest, was taken aside and given a talking to. I got a little of it. She was told to go on her way and cause no disturbance of the peace, or else. She was told that it was only me that they wanted.

'Can't I say good-bye to him?' she asked.

The gendarme let her come to me. She kissed me fondly, then stepped back and looked at my handcuffed wrists. 'Don't you think, *monsieur*, that I should be paid for my time?' she enquired.

I was able to get a handful of francs out of my side coat pocket, despite the handcuffs, and I offered them to her. 'I've enjoyed it very much,' I said. 'Thank you.'

'It is such a shame,' she said with real feeling, taking the money and giving me another fast kiss.

'*Quel sentiment!*' exclaimed one of the gendarmes.

They loaded me into the first of the cars and we rode for ten minutes through a series of wide and narrow streets, stopping in front of a police station. The two plain-clothes men had accompanied me, one by my side and the other

in the front seat with the driver. They both got out and helped me to the sidewalk, then led me into the police station and to an office in the rear, to confront a small, rotund man in civilian clothes with a collar four sizes too large for him and a pair of eyes that seemed to bulge frightfully behind thick-lensed spectacles framed with gold. One of the plain-clothes men put the box of pounds on the desk in front of the fat one, then stood respectfully aside. He was of medium height, with a medium-hard face and a distinctly medium accent as he started to speak to me in English.

'Your name?' he asked me.

'Wright Hughey.'

'American?'

'Yes.'

'Occupation?'

'Ship's officer. First mate of the *Sarah V. Lovejoy*, now in the harbour.'

He translated this information for the little man at the desk, leaning over and making several notations on a pad. He then removed the lid from the box of money, and the oos and ahs and the rest of it began again. The second plain-clothes man joined them for a closer look. Then the questioning was resumed, but after each answer the information was translated for the fat man, and he made notes of it all with a small, neat hand on a small, neat pad.

'Where did you get this money?'

'It was given to me.'

'By whom?'

'I don't know.'

'Who does it belong to?'

'I don't know.'

'What are you doing with it?'

'I was going to give it to the police.'

'A likely story.'

'Yes, isn't it!'

'This is serious. No jokes.'

'No jokes.'

'You are aware that the possession of so many pounds is illegal?'

'I have heard so.'

'Yet you did have them, did you not?'

'Quite.'

'Quite.'

During this questioning, the second plain-clothes man had been walking around me, looking at my face in both profiles, examining the colour of my eyes and, apparently, hunting for any small blemishes of the skin that would be revealed only by the closest scrutiny. Then suddenly he snapped his fingers at me and walked to a large filing cabinet against one wall and began examining the contents of the drawers. I noticed his activity but gave it no particular thought. I saw him pull out a paper and several photographs and look at them triumphantly. He looked at me again for a moment, then marched to the fat man's desk and laid the paper and photograph down in front of him with a loud, happy '*Voilà!*'

The fat man stopped his writing and looked at this new material. The interpreter leaned over the desk and looked at it, too. I was just as curious as he was, but I was better able to restrain myself. But that didn't make me feel good very long.

The fat man looked up at me with a scowl. '*Vous êtes Conrad Chancellor, n'est-ce pas?*'

'*Non, monsieur,*' I replied, '*je suis Wright Hughey. J'ai tous mes papiers et passeport.*' I tapped my coat pocket with my manacled hands. The interpreter came to my side and lifted my papers with deft fingers. He also brought up a lot of crumpled 10,000 franc notes which fluttered to the floor. He bent down to retrieve these before placing the papers and the notes on the fat man's desk. The



latter looked through my passport, then examined the other papers which included a photostat of my master's licence and photostats of my final Navy orders detaching me from active duty and my discharge. He nodded over them, looked at the other material handed him by the detective, then gave a sharp and short order to the second plain-clothes man. The latter left the office, and the questioning was resumed by the interpreter.

'But you are, as a matter of fact, Conrad Chancellor?'

'No, I am not,' I said with emphasis. 'I've given you all my papers. Don't they mean anything!'

'No,' he replied. 'Such papers are easy to purchase. We are not such fools as you would think, *monsieur*.'

'I hadn't thought about it, but I will if you're going to act so asinine.'

'Pardon?'

'Skip it. You've got me cold with the pound notes. I've got no acceptable alibi. I'll take the rap on that, whatever it is. If it's a fine. I've got plenty of money to pay. If it's anything else, I want to see the American Consul, and right away. But don't go saying I'm someone else, and trying to frame me on some other charge. Do you understand all that, *monsieur*?'

He looked puzzled for a moment, then nodded his head slowly. He translated what I had said to the fat man. When he was through, the latter grunted.

Then the second plain-clothes man returned from his errand and spoke briefly to the fat man. It appeared to be good news he heard. He smiled broadly. He got up and took a briefcase from the floor by his desk. He opened it and put my papers and my money inside. He closed the briefcase, gave an order about the box of English pounds, then came to my side and took me by the arm. '*Alors, nous allons*,' he said pleasantly. He took his iron hat off a hook by the door as we went through. He led me to a car parked in a driveway beside the station and we both got in the

back. The interpreter, who apparently had taken another route, was in the seat and he took off immediately.

I was curious, of course, but I was damned if I was going to show it to them. But I suppose I should have spoken up, if only to register a protest. For we drove to an airport, got into a special plane, and flew to Paris.

II

I had a little over an hour in that plane to attempt to add up my column of figures, but they all turned out to be zeros. There were no answers that were acceptable. Here and there was a small glimmer of reason, but never enough to light up this ridiculous series of incidents, or coincidences, or whatever they were, so that a pattern could be clearly seen. There were no two and two that made a four; there was never any ergo this, or Q.E.D. There had been a number of people who thought they knew me, or did know me, although I knew none of them. There had been the matter of the police refusing to accept my identity. Why? Was this a reasonable thing? And now there was this kidnapping, this being taken to Paris by private aeroplane, but apparently under official auspices. The fat little auspices with the bulging eyes was dozing right next to me.

Also, who was this Conrad Chancellor that the police kept throwing in my teeth? It was a nice enough name – perhaps an improvement over Wright Hughey – but it meant no more to me than a brillig gabe.

We landed at what I later learned was Orly Airport just before sunset and taxied to a far corner of the field where there was a car waiting for us. Two hard types in trench-coats were standing beside the car, and they looked quite capable of handling me in case I got any ideas, which

I well might have got otherwise. I wasn't taking all of this lying down; don't get that idea. I was watching carefully and patiently for an opening, waiting for someone to make a mistake. So there hadn't been any mistakes yet, except possibly my own in hanging on to the box of pound notes. But that didn't keep me from hoping.

The two trench-coats looked me over carefully as we approached their car. The little fat officer walked jauntily by my side, swinging the briefcase. I still wore the handcuffs, so I did no swinging. One of the men opened the car door and the other moved to the opposite door and got in as I did. Then the second followed me, and I was wedged tightly between them. The fat one got into the front seat next to the driver, who was an old party with a lush soup-strainer growing on his upper lip.

We drove at high speed through a lot of streets, all of which looked alike. The driver mumbled constantly to himself as he swung around corners with the tyres screaming and brushed by the other vehicles we met with sometimes as much as a half-inch to spare. This situation continued for an hour, and finally we drew up sharply in front of a huge double door that was closed. The driver raced his engine a couple of times and the door was opened by another ancient who might have been the twin of the driver. There was a square blue plate with a white nine on it to the right of the door, but I hadn't noticed the name of the street where we stopped. We drove into a courtyard, the door was closed, and suddenly lights came on all around us to dispel the gathering dusk. One of the trench-coats gave me a hand getting out of the narrow car door and then we all stood by the car for a moment, the two trench-coats, the driver, the fat man, and myself, while the lights glared at us. I looked around at rows of black windows and finally spied one, off to our right, with faint lines of light edging the drapes. We all moved off in that direction, the trench-coats leading the way with the fat

one urging me forward with a hand on my arm. We climbed a flight of stairs, walked down a hall, and paused before an impressive carved door. The stairs and hallway were expensively carpeted and the interior of the building, the rear one of the three forming the court, gave off an air of luxury and thoughtful decoration which contrasted strongly with its dingy exterior. One of the trench-coats knocked on the door, then opened it. The fat officer unlocked my handcuffs with unusual speed, slipped them off, then motioned me inside.

I walked alone into a large, square room furnished as an office. A huge mahogany desk was across the draped window, with the chair behind it facing into the room. There was a smaller desk by the door and an assortment of deep leather chairs and smoking stands arranged for comfort. A long divan was against one wall and above it hung a huge map of France, wonderfully drawn and brightly coloured. There were maps of the United States and the British Isles, equally well executed, on the opposite wall. •

Behind the large desk sat a man with a shining pink British face and the baldest head I'd ever seen. What little hair he had fringing his smooth dome was cut so short that one got the impression of complete nudity. He was regarding me with hard speculation as I stopped in the centre of the room and looked about me. I looked at him for an instant, then glanced at the walls and the furniture. I saw two other men in the leather chairs, and they too were regarding me closely. One had a typical American businessman face—the successful executive kind that decorates the offices of New York and points west. The third was hard to place. He might have been anything, from a French wine salesman to a Bulgarian diplomat. He was definitely European, but nothing else specific.

I stood waiting patiently for the scrutiny to end and the conversation to begin. I was entirely ready to tell some-

body off, although the atmosphere of the building and particularly the room had something about it that gave friendly confidence, and a small part of my anger subsided.

Pink-face behind the desk spoke first, 'Remarkable,' he said. The American nodded in agreement and got out of his chair. He walked around me sizing me up as though I were a brand-new Epstein with, perhaps, a hole in the middle. 'Never saw anything like it,' he opined.

The third man sat where he was and grimaced at me with half-closed eyes. 'It is such a fantastic idea that it might work,' he said. He spoke with a marked accent, but easily.

I gave my choler a preliminary run, trying it out for acceleration. 'What the hell is this?' I demanded in a voice that had made many an A.B. jump, through the years.

The American cocked his head to me, apparently savouring the timbre of my voice. 'Would you mind saying that again?' he asked politely. 'Try it just a little more quietly.'

'God damn it,' I said, 'make sense. Who the hell are you? Why was I brought here?'

'Truly wonderful!' exclaimed Pink-face, leaning back in his chair. 'I tell you, gentlemen, it *will* work!'

The American stopped his circling and faced me, sticking out his hand. 'I am Avery Franklin,' he said. I shook hands with him reluctantly and was surprised at the strength of his grip. He took me by the arm and introduced me to the others. 'This is General Delong,' he said, stopping in front of the European. The latter jumped to his feet and gave my hand a fast French pump. He was taller than I had imagined him. His smile was frosty and distant; he was the kind of man few people would ever get to know.

The Englishman, Captain Burleigh, was formal, correct. He gave my hand a hard squeeze, then sat down promptly and began looking through a pile of papers on his desk. 'We've got some of your record here, Hughey,' he said, 'but

there's nothing after 1945, when you got out of the Navy. We'd like to know about those years up to the present.'

'Who would like to know?' I asked.

'We - me,' he replied. 'You see, we can't very well go ahead with this unless we know more about you, now can we?'

'You can't?' I said.

'Impossible.'

'Now isn't that just too damned bad?' I said, laying it on thick.

His face turned eight shades redder and he glared up at me. Franklin, standing by my side, laughed. 'He doesn't know what you're talking about, Freddy,' he said. 'Why don't we start at the beginning?'

Burleigh scowled at him for a moment, then his face brightened. 'Oh, I see what you mean,' he said. 'Of course!'

Meanwhile I'd been casting about for another scintillating comment, but the best I could do was, 'Let's get on with it, gentlemen. I've a boat to catch.'

'Well,' said Burleigh, ignoring my remark, 'it appears that you bear a remarkable resemblance to a person named Connie, for Conrad, Chancellor. The likeness is so close, in fact, that you have completely taken in the French police, who arrested you in Marseilles. That small, plump man who came up here with you is an outstanding Bertillon expert, and he swears that you are Chancellor.'

'I'm not Chancellor,' I announced, just for the record.

'We know that,' he replied with some asperity. 'You couldn't be, for a good and sufficient reason. But you do look like him . . . You appear to be minus a scar on your neck and your nose, I would say, is a trifle smaller, but otherwise you'd do perfectly. I've just been phoning your Navy people in Washington and I find that you have an exceptional record. Navy Cross and all that. If there's

nothing against you since 1945, as I said, then we could use you.'

'Provided,' I said, 'I wanted to be used.'

'What? . . . Oh, I see. Well, do you?'

'No.'

'No? See here, now, you can't turn us down out of hand!'

'I just have turned you down,' I said. Well, that made us even, in a way. He and his playmates had had me upset long enough. Now it was my turn.

Franklin stepped in at that point. 'You haven't enquired what we are offering you,' he pointed out.

'Not interested,' I said.

'How can you know?'

'I'll take that chance.'

There was a long silence. The general got out of his chair and walked around to stand by Burleigh and look me over again. Franklin lit a cigarette, then offered me one, which I took. He held his lighter for me, then blew it out and put it in his coat pocket.

'I want you to listen to me,' he said in a high-pressure, executive manner, 'we have a critical situation here and you can be of tremendous help to us because of this very peculiar circumstance of your resembling another person. It is a one-in-a-million sort of thing that would not be believed if it were not seen. The name of the man is, of course, Chancellor.'

Well, that added up. That accounted for some of the mystery of the events in Marseilles. But who was Connie Chancellor?

'Who is Connie Chancellor?' I asked.

'A minor crook and con man,' he replied. 'I suppose that you would say he was on his way up to the big time – but we'll get to those details later. The main point now is that——'

'Pardon me,' I interrupted, 'but let's take first things first. What kind of a trap am I in? You gentlemen appear to be

respectable, and certainly I have had evidence that you have official connections, but that doesn't prove a thing to me. What racket are you engaged in?

A choking noise came from the big desk, and I looked over to see Burleigh with his hand over his mouth. I couldn't tell whether he was laughing or in the midst of a choleric spasm. Delong's face dropped a bit, but he retained his composure. Franklin grinned at me.

'A good question,' he said. 'This is the European headquarters of the International Criminal Investigation Authority, D-Section, known as DICA. We here are, in a sense, the directors of the organization. Does that allay your fears?'

He was getting too high hat. 'Cops!' I said.

He stopped smiling. 'Yes, we are engaged in police work, Mr Hughey.'

'And you want to hire my face because it looks like somebody else's?'

'Your face *and* your brains, if that's not asking too much.'

'I have a job,' I said. 'I've been spending ten years at this job—ever since I got out of the Navy. I'll have a ship of my own in another year, at the most. Let's hear you top that.'

'We'd want you for a short time,' he replied. 'We can guarantee that it will be long hours, hard work, and very dangerous. But, at the end of the period you'll have more money than you could earn in five years at sea. And if you come through for us, I think that we may be able to assure you a ship of your own. We have a lot of influence in many quarters, you know.'

'But there's an "if" — "if I come through." If I don't get a bellyful of lead, you mean.'

He shrugged politely. 'I suppose that worried you when you were a beach-master at Okinawa?'

'That was yesterday . . . I promised myself on that beach that if I lived, I'd take very good care of myself for the

rest of my life. I promised myself that I'd stay away from beaches, if you know what I mean.'

He nodded. 'Yes, I was there for a time. First Marines. Well, Hughey, I don't know what else to say. I can understand your reluctance to get mixed up in our kind of business. We here are inured to it. We are undismayed by the big, bad outlaws, organized crime, the underworld . . . Maybe we haven't got sense enough to be afraid.

What was he doing, challenging me? Did he think he was a better man than I was? That any of them was better? 'It's not a question of fear,' I said. 'It's just good sense.'

'I agree with you,' he insisted. 'You've got more good sense than we have.'

'All right, damn it,' I said, 'let's get down to cases. You want me to pose as this Chancellor. You think that's intelligent. You think I can get away with it. I say that's an opium pipe dream, right out of Fu Manchu and Alice in Wonderland. Didn't this guy Chancellor have any friends? Didn't he sleep around with any dames? You think a friend, and especially a dame who'd swapped spit with him and shared a bed with him, wouldn't know? Brother, I'd like to see that!'

Franklin looked past me at Burleigh and raised his eyebrows in a question. Burleigh nodded at him. He put a hand on my arm.

'It happens, Hughey, that we'd considered the same problem,' he said. 'I want you to realize that we've weighed all of these chances very carefully; that we're not going to risk your life needlessly; that we are as determined to protect you as you are yourself. You'll have the finest and the most complete organization of its kind in the world behind you - unlimited resources, exceptional brains, and the strength of a thousand trained men.'

I waited for him to run down. 'And about the dames?' I reminded him.

'We'll let you prove it to yourself, as well as to us,' he

said. 'Don't take my word for it. Try it. And if it doesn't work, then we'll call it a night. You'd be no use to us. Is that a fair enough test?'

'Fair enough,' I replied. I knew it wouldn't work. This Franklin obviously hadn't had much experience with women. I guess none of them had, by the looks of them.

DeLong went to the wall map of France and pulled a cord beside the map. The bottom rolled up, revealing a long glass panel, about four feet high and half the length of the wall. It looked into the adjoining room, which was dimly lighted with a couple of floor lamps and was furnished as a lounging room, or wardroom. There was a small bar in one corner and a piano against the far wall. There was no one in it.

'This is a one-way glass,' said Franklin, indicating the window. 'You can see through this side only. The other side is a mirror. You go into that room' - he indicated a door leading through at the front of the office - 'and we will remain here and watch you. Presently a young lady will come in. Her name is Judy Deprez. She's half French, half American, and has known Chancellor for a long time and quite well. She will expect you to kiss her if she believes you are Chancellor. You carry on from there.'

I nodded at him and went into the adjoining room. I looked instinctively at the glass and found that it was a beautifully panelled mirror over a long bookcase. The rest of the room was as I had seen it. I hunted for the light switch by the entrance door and turned on the lights in the large candelabra that hung from the centre of the ceiling. I didn't want this Judy to make any mistakes in the dark. Then I sat down on the piano bench and waited.

The opening of the door startled me. I had been expecting it, waiting for it, but when it happened I jumped. I forced myself to sit still. The door opened slowly and for an instant there was no one. Then suddenly she was there, looking curiously into the room at everything on the left

side, then swinging her eyes to where I was sitting. I could see her breast rise as she suddenly sucked in her breath. She was a small girl with dark, neat hair and eyes that looked enormous. She was dressed in a navy shantung suit that fitted her trim figure like a sheath. There was a white scarf at her neck, and her pretty legs flashed enticingly as she walked quickly to me. I got up, towering over her, and stood looking down. She came up to me and put her arms around my waist, bending her head back and parting her full lips slightly.

'Connie!' she exclaimed under her breath.

I bent down and kissed her. That part of the assignment I liked. She was a lovely little dish. But I was not prepared for the impact of her ardour. She seemed to put into that kiss everything that was inside her – inside her heart. It was obvious she had thought a lot of this Chancellor, and that gave me a momentary qualm, reaping a harvest sown by someone else.

Then she suddenly pushed me away and frowned up at me.

Now it comes, I thought. The big denouement scene. The accusation: 'Why, you're not Connie Chancellor!' The indignation: 'What do you mean by taking advantage of me!'

But she just looked at me with that frown. Then she backed away a step and sighed. When she spoke, it was barely audible. I wasn't sure for a moment, that I had heard her.

'You've never kissed me that way before,' she said.

Well, all right, so Connie Chancellor had never kissed her the way Wright Hughey did. So much the worse for Mr Chancellor. But then she'd realize, at any instant now, that I wasn't her Connie at all. I watched her face for some sign of that knowledge, but that slight frown of hers revealed none of her thoughts to me.

'I haven't?' I said.

She shook her head and gave me a wee, small smile. But that lasted only a fleeting second, then the frown came back and there was an unmistakable look of fear in her eyes.

'What are you doing here, Connie?' she demanded. 'Do you realize where you are?'

So she still thought I was he - Connie, in spite of everything! The kiss, the voice, the whole impromptu scene had revealed nothing to her. Could I have been as wrong as that?

'You know me?' I asked her. 'You're certain who I'am?'

'What do you mean, do I know you!' she flared at me indignantly. 'You tell me what you are doing here! You answer my question!'

I shook my head at her, turned away abruptly, and walked quickly to the door by which I'd entered. For some reason I felt defeated. I was retreating, and not in very good order. I'd gotten myself into a situation I couldn't cope with at all. I opened the door and ducked back into the office. Burleigh locked it behind me.

I looked through the window and saw Judy standing where I had left her, her head turned towards the door through which I'd fled. Then Franklin came into the ward-room and strode to her side. She swung her head around and gave him an odd smile. Her voice, her every breath could be heard through a loud-speaker over Burleigh's desk.

'Where'd he go?' she demanded.

'He'll be around,' said Franklin. 'He's going to work with us now.'

Her face lighted up. 'He is!' she exclaimed. Then she patted his cheek and hurried out, with a flash of those pretty legs.

Franklin returned immediately to the office and beamed at me as he closed the door behind himself.

'What do you think now?' he asked me.

'I was wrong about that,' I admitted. 'However, I don't think you should have told her I'm going to work here. I'm not.'

'Now see here, old man, you distinctly made an agreement,' said Burleigh, coming around from behind his desk and facing me.

I shook my head at him. 'I made no agreement, captain,' I said. 'I indicated merely that I did not believe I could pass as Connie Chancellor with anyone who had known him intimately. Well, I was wrong. I've admitted that. But there's still one person left who is not going to be fooled for an instant, and until you tell me how to get around that obstacle, I'm not going to buy anything at your store.'

'I get your meaning,' said Burleigh, 'but somehow the sense of it escapes me. Whom couldn't you fool?'

'Connie Chancellor!'

Well, I had them there. And that would be the end of the whole silly business. They could get me back to Marseilles in plenty of time to catch the ship, even if it did sail at midnight, which was very unlikely. I looked at my watch. Twenty-two minutes past nine.

I started for the hat-rack by the door to retrieve my Stetson and get under way. It was General Delong who spoke next.

'That is our simplest problem, Mr Hughey,' he said. 'If you will just come with us, we will demonstrate the solution to you in a most acceptable manner.'

I turned slowly and looked at the three of them, standing in a row and nodding pleasantly at me. Now what could they have up their collective sleeve? If I hadn't been so preoccupied with my own cleverness, so enamoured of my own logic, I would have seen it right away. But I didn't see it. Instead I told myself that they were a bundle of fogies trying to out-fox the fox; that they'd all fall flat on their faces.

'I shall be happy to see your demonstration,' I said.

'We'll take the girl, too,' said Burleigh. 'Get it all over with one fell swoop.'

'My God, is that necessary?' asked Franklin.

'Of course it's necessary,' said Burleigh. 'Don't be such a sentimentalist, Avery. Do her good. Mooning over that damned scum.'

We four went out together and down the hall towards the stairway. We stopped at the last door and Burleigh knocked. Then he opened the door and I saw Judy sitting at a desk typing. She smiled at Burleigh, then looked past him and saw me. She waved a hand, got up and came bouncing out. 'Where'd you go?' she asked me.

Burleigh followed her to the hall. Before I could answer, he cut in, 'Judy, this is Mr Hughey, Wright Hughey. Just remember that. Don't ask any questions. And Hughey, don't you answer any. Come with us. We're going to show you something.'

Judy grabbed hold of my arm and held on as though it were a stanchion of a plunging ship and we followed the three down the stairs. 'What's old Burleigh mean?' she whispered in my ear.

I shrugged. 'How should I know?'

'He's crazy as a loon,' she confided. 'You watch out for him. I'll tell you more tonight, when . . .' She didn't finish it. She jumped up and kissed me on the ear.

We went along a lower hall, down another flight of steps, and to a small basement room with a long table in the centre upon which was an object covered with a sheet. The walls were whitewashed, there was a single overhead light, and there was the strong smell of disinfectant. One knew instinctively that here was death – that the object under the sheet was a body. Judy drew back at the door, a look of dismay on her face. 'I don't want to go in there,' she said firmly.

'Come, now, Judy,' said Burleigh, taking her by the arm

and' pulling her away from me. 'This is for your benefit, too.'

Then we were all in the room, grouped around one end of the table. Judy was between Burleigh and me, and beyond Burleigh was Franklin, then Delong. Suddenly Burleigh reached out a hand and threw back the sheet. We all stared down at the gray, clay-like face of a dead man. I gave it a first, indifferent glance, then was startled as I never have been before. The face that looked up at mine was my own! Detail for detail, line for line, here was Wright Hughey in his final, long sleep. A chill coursed up and down my spine and I felt my hands go icy.

Then there was a sudden sharp pain in my wrist and I came back with a snap to the reality – that I wasn't looking at myself; that I wasn't dead. Judy's fingernails had dug deep into my flesh, and even today there are four tiny white scars to remind me of that awful moment.

I looked down to find her staring at me, her large eyes wide with fear. She backed against the wall and leaned there, her hands hanging loosely, her head bowed.

It was Franklin's smooth voice that broke the heavy silence. 'The late Conrad Chancellor,' he said. He glanced from the dead face to my own. 'Now you understand, Mr Hughey?'

I nodded at him and looked back at Judy. Burleigh had moved to her side and his arm was around her shoulder. Her face had set into firm lines and she looked at him with defiance. 'It means nothing to me,' she said. She looked at me and gave me a wry smile. 'But I must admit it's confusing.' Then she waved her hand at the table and said, 'Think of all the time I wasted! Well, what do I call you, Wright?'

'You will continue to call him Connie Chancellor,' said Franklin. 'He will be our replacement, and yours too, for the purposes of your work.'

Delong put the sheet back over the face. He said, more

to himself than to any of us, 'Shot this afternoon - poor devil. We had to do it.'

The silence became thick, oppressive. They all looked at me and it seemed that I was expected to say something. But I didn't feel much like talking. I had just seen myself dead, and I didn't like it a bit.

Finally I pointed my finger at Franklin's face. It seemed the most sympathetic. 'You win,' I said.

III

There was no formal introduction into DICA, nor was there any explanation during the first days of my week of training why they wanted someone to impersonate Connie Chancellor, what great crime plot if any they were working on, or, in fact, what D-Section itself was composed of and why. They kept me so busy I didn't have time to ask. All I found out about them was that they were efficient, that they had a lot of smart cookies working with them, and that they were firmly convinced I had the stamina of an ox and the hide of a rhinoceros.

The first step was a brief session with a photographer who submerged his artistic impulses for speed, and a long stop at the fingerprint bureau. They not only printed my fingers but registered my feet and forehead. I couldn't help thinking of these favourite members being detached and lying on a slab somewhere for final identification. I couldn't help thinking about the gray face of Connie Chancellor, either. They were not happy thoughts.

Judy accompanied me on this round, but she was a much different Judy from the girl of the wardroom. Her greeting, that next morning, was, 'Now let's get this straight, Connie. Since I don't *have* to make love to you any more, suppose we just skip it.' So I asked her, 'Was it

that bad?' and she replied shortly, 'I'd prefer not to talk about it. Do you mind?'

It appeared as though she'd had a bad night. Her guard was away up. I was a part of it, certainly, but why? Was she afraid of me now? Did she think I was about to step into Connie's bedroom slippers? Or was she just mourning her dead love?

Her attitude reduced our conversation to the bare essentials. After the fingerprint bureau, she led me to the infirmary, a modern small hospital with operating room and a half a dozen beds on the top floor. I was introduced to Dr Grenelle, a large, round, happy Frenchman with a ridiculous beard and lively ferret eyes. He explained to me what he was going to do, which was to duplicate the scar that was on the original Connie Chancellor's neck, and also give a little more heft to my nose. He promised only minor discomfort and, with a nod towards Judy, loving care. She gave him back a stony stare for that suggestion.

Two hours later, with my neck and nose bandaged, taped, and numb, Judy led me from the infirmary and I began my lessons. All I had to learn were the details of the life of Connie Chancellor since birth in a Providence, R.I., slum in 1921, the names of all his friends and associates in Europe, who they were, what they looked like, and what dealings he had had with them; the likewise of a score or more people of ill repute in America; his tastes in clothes and food and women and diversion and literature; his handwriting, his vices, and – his virtue. He had a virtue. He liked dogs.

And, just to make it easy, I had a whole week to become letter-perfect, just so that I could have an even chance of staying alive. You'd say it was impossible. I did say it was impossible. General Delong, who was with us at that critical moment, nodded in agreement.

'But always keep in mind that you have your appearance to back you up,' he said, 'and it will not be taken amiss

that you forget. Bluff will do it, as long as you maintain confidence. Now I want you to meet Dr Fourcade who is one of the world's foremost psychologists and memory experts, and he will teach you how to remember all you must learn.'

'You'll need a dozen head-shrinkers to get me off this hook,' I told him gloomily. The numbness was beginning to wear off. My nose felt as though it had stopped one of Marciano's hay-makers and there was a hot iron pressing against my neck. 'I'll take a West Indian hurricane any time in preference to this.'

'Bear with us,' he asked. 'We've got too much at stake not to give it a try. If you can't make it at the end of the week, then you can't, and we'll abandon the whole project.'

'Meanwhile my ship's sailed and here I am.'

'Your ship sailed this morning. We gave Captain Eversole another mate. Our man in Marseilles reports that you weren't even missed. Well, we'll get you another ship, as we promised.'

'All right,' I said. 'I can spare a week. Where's this memory magician?'

I spent most of the night with Fourcade, and I must admit he was an astounding old man. He got more out of that rusty mind of mine in those few hours than I'd been able to produce unaided in twenty years. He must have found the hidden button to my ego, as well, because he had me believing for a time that I was going to make the grade.

But that didn't last too long, either. Something made me easily slip into depression. Was it the unceasing pounding at my brain, with all the dull details of a mean and shabby life? Was it the routine and the confinement and the unaccustomed activity? Fourcade told me it was all of those things, along with a good chunk of apprehension at the unknown that lay ahead of me.

Maybe he was right. I cast about for any diversion and

on the second day I came back to the obvious – Judy. She had been assigned to coach me on Chancellor's intimate habits, and we were spending several hours a day together, in between the psychologists, professors and the interminable dossier files.

'Why the freeze?' I asked her, as we sat down to lunch in the apartment they had given me in the north wing.

She gave me some more of that cold eye and helped herself to the hors d'œuvre.

'You're still pining for Chancellor,' I said. 'You've got a fixation for him, and so you're afraid of me.'

'You pick up that psychological double-talk fast, don't you?' she said.

'It's easy. If we had a couch, I could give you a better workout than Chancellor ever dreamed of. Psychological, that is.'

Her face got red. A glint came into her eyes. 'Look, buster,' she growled at me, 'stop stepping on my toes. Chancellor was my job and nothing else. If I hadn't done it, you'd be away out in left field with a pop-bottle embedded in that thick skull of yours.'

'All right, get mad. You're a lot more than a lady cop doing a job, and you know it. You're a bundle of conflicts, a little girl who has been hurt, a grown woman who has made a lot of fine new resolutions. But the grown woman hasn't got much sympathy to waste on the little girl. Right?'

'Leave my personal life out of it, please,' she said, her voice suddenly pleading.

'I'd just like to be your friend,' I told her seriously. 'I don't see any other possibilities around this damned factory.'

She didn't answer me. She didn't reject my offer, but she didn't accept it either. She was going to take an awful lot of patience.

The minutes and the hours and the days were so much

alike that there was small awareness of the passage of time. It was like living on a treadmill, walking slowly forward all the time but getting nowhere, the same monotonous activity over and over again until even consciousness itself became unpleasant. Mixed in with this was the blur of faces, the drone of voices, the occasional movement of bodies and the gesture of hands. Even Judy's face was a blur most of the time. I was tired, mentally and physically. And when I thought about it at all, I was convinced that what I was doing was utterly absurd.

But there must have been progress, whether I was aware of it or not. It was comparable in many ways to what is called 'brain-washing,' although this was actually brain-stuffing and brain-expanding. I have recollections here and there of earning praise for passing tests. I recall that I often surprised myself into momentary pleasure by dredging up from unknown recesses of my mind the most remarkable collection of data concerning my dead predecessor.

And I was assuming his identity, or certain aspects of it, as one might assume a different form of dress, or a full beard. I don't mean that I ever actually felt I was Connie Chancellor rather than Wright Hughey. There was no melodramatic personality switch, nor was there such a thing considered. It was merely that I accepted a slightly different way of walking, an alteration in my usual form of speech, and, most important, the name. Once I had gotten over the hurdle of the name and agreed to accept it as my own, then I became as much of Chancellor at least as the name implied. But most of the rest of it had been done by nature and genes and, I suppose, accident. But how can I make my own feelings clear, when I was so entirely unaware of them? Numbness and resentment were the most constant occupants of my conscious mind.

I depended more and more upon Judy as time passed and as I got to know her better. She was a slick operator –

probably the most unusual woman who has ever engaged in undercover work of any kind, and that takes in all of her sisters of the espionage sorority. I learned she was in the complete confidence of DICA; that probably she knew more about its operations than Franklin or Delong. Possibly not more than Burleigh, however, for there was a man who carried more detail in his head, readily available, than any person I have ever met.

But Judy was the chick who had picked over the entire feed-yard. She was the trouble-shooter who could charm anyone into an indiscreet conversation, who could dissemble perfectly at all times, who could be accepted anywhere and find out anything. She was a good little actress, and her looks were all going for her. She could be a tough babe or a lady, from one minute to the next, and always, no matter what role she undertook, were those big innocent eyes to lead you astray.

So how about Chancellor No. 1, then? Could such a woman be taken in by a minor hoodlum? Could she have actually loved him? It sounds unreasonable, ridiculous, impossible. But I know enough about women to know that I don't know anything about them, and so - I don't know. And neither did Franklin nor Delong nor Burleigh, although the latter did a lot of plain and fancy guessing.

But no matter how she had felt about him and why, Judy did know a lot about Chancellor, and most of this knowledge she passed on to me with charming, and often humorous, comment and mimicry. She would show me how he walked when he entered a room, then she would make me try to walk that way. I was not a fast study, and she would go over it again and again, making a game of it and satirizing his movements until even I learned them. The same with his pronunciation of certain words and his tricks of inflection and his pitch of voice, his manner of eating (which was untidy) and his habits of dress (sharp).

But one subject remained difficult. His love-making.

Judy wouldn't break down on that, and she became immediately angry and icy whenever I brought it up.

'I've got to know about that,' I told her at one of the last sessions, with what I considered to be reasonable insistence.

'No,' she said.

'You're still afraid, huh?'

'Lay off me,' she said softly, spacing the words for emphasis. 'I've told you that before.'

'I wouldn't ask you if it were not important to me. Everybody here agrees that it is. You're the only one who can coach me.'

'No.'

'Will you answer one sensible question?'

'Maybe.'

'Is it because you were in love with him?'

'I can't see that that's any of your business,' she flared. 'What are you probing for, a specimen for your butterfly collection?'

I tried another approach. 'I've told you before, I've got only one thing in mind. Friendship. Apparently you don't want mine.'

She gave me a long, appraising look. God knows what was going on inside that bright brain of hers. Calculation, I presume, without one small smudge of emotion to colour it in any way. 'I like you,' she said finally with a coldness that reached my spine. 'But I'll tell you something which you should have found out for yourself already. There are no friends in this business. There's no room for friendships. You want to go around wagging your tail and licking people's hands, you go back to your ships. Get out of DICA.'

'To hell with DICA!' I said. And I meant it.

Well, that was one side of Judy. And of our lessons together. But there were several others I had discovered, and one in particular that was all female. She was jealous.

But whether it was of me or of Connie No. 1, I had no way of being sure. At first I assumed it was of him, but I soon thought differently.

She wouldn't talk about Judy and Connie, but she would about Diane and Connie. Diane Gilbert was the bright young star of the show at the Théâtre Pleyel, a theatre-night club in the swank Champs Elysées district. Chancellor had been giving her a big play before his demise, and DICA considered it advisable for me to take up where he had left off. Under different circumstances, I would have liked nothing better. Her photographs – and there were hundreds – showed a lush beauty that was crying for someone like me. But – here was Test A again. That man and woman thing that I had been so certain about before. Judy had demonstrated that I was wrong, but Judy was Judy, and I had by now recognized that she was unlike any other woman. Diane was an entirely different dish of artichokes. I had no confidence.

To complicate matters, Judy's picture of Diane was so filled with invective and belittling adjectives that it was unreliable. That was the jealousy. She could see nothing good in that girl, and so she found it almost impossible to tell me a straight story about Diane and Connie, or what she knew of them.

'How far did Chancellor get with her?' I asked.

'You name it. A cheap dame like that—!'

'No, you tell me. Let's be specific.'

She glared at me. 'Well, he was seeing her every night for a while. That was around late February, when she opened in this new show at the Théâtre Pleyel. Then he came back to me and told me they had quarrelled. I saw him steadily after that blow-off for a month or so, then he started slipping away again. That bitch!'

'When was this latest slippage?'

'Just before he went over to America to get the gold. Two or three weeks ago.'

'Details, lady. Let's have it.'

'He came up to my apartment one night late. He had lip rouge all over his shirt! I'd like to get hold of her! I'd—'

'You know it was her?'

'Of course I know it was her! Who else could it have been?'

'I'm asking you.'

'Well . . . Then I don't know.'

'There are lots of girls in Paris.'

'All right! It could have been somebody else! Are you satisfied?'

'Reasonably so. Now answer the first question. How far did he get with her?'

'Why don't you go see her and find out?'

'I intend to. But I'm damned if I want to stick my neck out more than I have to. You're not being much help. You're being stupid and jealous — over a dead man!'

She chewed that over. It seemed to calm her down, and I could almost hear that calculator-mind of hers clicking around with this new factor, seeking a place to fit it in.

'I'm being stupid, perhaps, but I'm not jealous — not of that other Connie,' she said.

'And certainly not of me.'

'No. . . . But I can't stand the idea of your going to her!'

'Dog in the manger. You don't want me, but you're damned if you want anyone else to have me.'

She came awfully close to breaking, for a moment. 'That's not true!' she exclaimed, the words tumbling over each other. 'I do want—' she stopped herself abruptly. She never said the 'you.' 'I do want her to have you, if she wants you,' she continued calmly. But is that what she had started to say?

'You're contradicting yourself,' I pointed out. 'You say you can't stand the idea of her having me. Then you say you want her to have me. Make up your mind.'

She smiled wryly. 'So I should! Well, you figure it out.'

'O.K. It's figured. Now how far did he get with her?'

'I don't know,' she answered in a small voice. 'I suspect; that's all. I wouldn't imagine that they got along too well.'

'Why?'

'Connie was difficult, sometimes. I guess he didn't treat women with much consideration.'

'But he liked dogs,' I said.

But no amount of coaching and studying of photographs, moving pictures, charts, statistics, and biography could bring any of this underworld to life and could make real people out of those in it. All of them, and particularly Diane who appeared not to be even part of any criminal activity but merely a girl Chancellor had known not too well, remained names on a list, some of them to be associated with faces in pictures. A figure would be flashed upon a screen, a man walking out of an office building and getting into a car waiting for him at the curb. You would see his size and his shape and his clothes and the way he walked and perhaps some little gesture that might or might not be characteristic. Perhaps there would be a brief flash of his face, clear enough so that the features could be distinguished. The camera would stop on that frame and you would have a good look. But what would it mean to me? Was this an actual person who might, very soon now, have a fatal influence on my life? No, I couldn't believe it; I couldn't accept that as fact, no matter how I tried. The person remained an abstraction, a lesson to study, like learning the multiplication table. My mind would go no further than the admonition of my instructors, to learn this face and to recognize it if and when I saw it.

There were scores of people I got to recognize in that minimum way, most of them average looking men and women whom one might encounter on any street. Once

in a while there would be an unusual face, and at least two of them remained sharply etched in my memory because of the great burden of evil that they carried in their features – Adolph Lauderbach and Julius Pindar. But too many of them remained mere fuzzy blobs, and not only because many of the pictures had been taken with telescopic lenses. Well, Diane didn't fall into either of those categories. She was not evil and she was not a blur. She was a most beautiful young lady, contrasting strangely in this rogues' gallery of the International Criminal Investigation Authority, Section D, and so there was a certain amount of pleasure during the periods devoted to her study. But she still remained a series of pictures and a name, and there was no sound and no touch and no warmth that made her human.

I knew that I would meet her and the rest of them soon enough, but there was nothing enticing in that prospect either, for if I would meet them, then they would meet me, the spurious Connie Chancellor. And the more of them who met me, the greater became the chance of my failure. So it seemed to me. So it seemed – that there was not one enticing aspect to this entire assignment that I had permitted myself to be sold upon, like the sucker that I was.

Towards the end of the week – exact days had ceased to exist by then – I began to get the answer to the Big Question – the Why. Any bird-brain would have begun to wonder by this time what all the shooting was about; why such a powerful organization would spend so much time and effort training an ex-sailor to impersonate a minor hoodlum.

It appears that DICA and the important national police organizations of the world had been able to penetrate only so far into the higher echelon of the international gang organization. Now it had become vital to put somebody up near the top. So they were going to train a man

of their own and give him such assistance in carrying out gang business that he would be forced upward quickly. And then, when he got there, DICA would be ready for the final kill.

This was no suddenly improvised plan. It had been under perfection for years. Two men were even then being trained in America to carry it through. What was sudden and what was improvised was me. I was dropped into their laps right out of heaven, a ready-made hood with a future. The opportunity was too good to pass up, and if they lost – what was the life of an obscure ship's officer?

But there was much more to it than that. There had to be to make them take a chance with an amateur. There had to be the sudden development of a situation that was so menacing, so dangerous that they'd throw away all the rule books and play a new kind of game.

DICA, of all police organizations, was prepared to do this. I can't go into the details of their set-up, for obvious reasons, but I'll tell you this: They had the authority to go further than any other police organization and they had the money to do it up fancy. They got their authority from a treaty among Great Britain, France, Holland, Italy, and America, known locally as the Chicago Pact, or Chicago. The idea behind it was dreamed up by the British Home Office, the French Ministry of Justice, and the U.S. Department of Justice. The plan was simple and direct. It was to cut across international borders, extradition treaties, writs of this and that, and all the legal folderol behind which the international criminals hide. There were brakes on it, of course – you can't go delegating unlimited authority to any group without asking them to topple you into the soup – but by and large, the International Criminal Investigation Authority had a free hand. They were as legal as they had to be, or as illegal as they had to be, to get results.

All of this and a lot more came out in sessions with

Captain Burleigh, General Delong, Avery Franklin, and a fat Dutchman by the name of van der Heide, in Burleigh's office.

This van der Heide was the last of the DICA people whom I met during the training, although strictly speaking he was not of D-Section any more than I was. He was introduced as a chemist and as the outstanding currency expert in the world, but the significance of that I didn't learn until this final session with the DICA command, when they got down to cases and told me exactly where I fitted in and what I was to do.

But first came theory and organization.

The higher echelons of international gangdom are inhabited by a loosely-knit brotherhood and there is no single over-all command in the sense that one would encounter it in the business world. There is, for instance, one group that controls the bulk of the narcotics trade. But that does not mean that there are no others engaged in the same activity, or that other dope dealers cannot take over territories if they have the proper connections. In the same way, there is one group that controls the black market, prostitution, and rackets generally of France. The control here is Corsican. No Frenchman can operate a *bistro* in Paris unless he pays tribute. But at the same time there are night clubs operating independently of this control, and there are also black market activities that elude the iron hand of Julius Pindar and his Corsicans. The reason is that certain members of the gang élite permit it to be that way.

This gang élite in Europe, as in America, comprises many who are outwardly respectable, for the underworld today owns as many legitimate businesses as it does illegitimate. They own banks and ships and hotels and office buildings and any number of enterprises engaged in the world's commerce. They have been forced into legitimacy by their accumulated wealth—through the

necessity of keeping their money occupied. They have run out of rackets.

Somewhere up in these rarefied precincts of the underworld élite had been hatched a plot so sensationally destructive that the entire economy of the Western World could be wrecked thereby. It was, simply, to let loose a flood of billions of dollars, in the currencies of three countries. The money was all spurious, but counterfeits of such perfect workmanship that detection would be impossible with the tests and instruments available.

That was the main part of it. Naturally there would be provision made by the gang rulers to avoid drowning themselves in their own flood. That was something DICA was not sure about yet, but they did have sufficient facts to be certain of the principal ingredient of the plot. The evidence was piling in daily from their intelligence network and it told them, furthermore, that their time was getting short; that something would have to be done immediately.

Burleigh, Delong, and Franklin told me all they knew of this conspiracy. They discussed the tangibles and the intangibles. They analysed the methods by which such an operation could be carried out and the manner of men who could have conceived it.

‘But one thing is clear to all of us,’ said Burleigh, ‘and that is that only a single plan of distribution will be practicable. The gang world can do only one thing with this much currency. They must dump it all at one time. They must get rid of it somehow in a lump, or it will do them no good at all. They would have to be very stupid not to realize what measures would be taken against them if they tried to dribble it out on the world’s fiscal markets. . . . Well, that’s where we have them blocked. We’ve got them bottled up tighter than the Germans at Jutland. We’ve closed every avenue of transportation for the huge bulk so much money represents. We are blockading every air-

port, seaport, and international road, and we've abolished smuggling in Europe for the time being.

'But we are not fooling ourselves either. How long can we keep it up? How long will it take these immensely powerful and resourceful men to find means to circumvent us? I think that at the very outside, at the most optimistic, we have about a month.'

Van der Heide then spoke, for the first time, after this dire pronouncement. He was about as plump as a Dutchman is liable to get, but there was nothing of the traditionally jolly fat man about him. His eyes were china-blue and as hard as arctic ice. Even the fat on him seemed to be hard and unyielding. His movements were unexpectedly lithe and quick; he gave the impression of unusual power – a good man to have on your side. He spoke with authority about general theories of money, then switched suddenly to counterfeiting, its history, its development since the use of paper and printing, and its techniques. It was a subject he knew well, and he demonstrated some of his points with apparatus he had brought, including chemicals for cleaning the ink off banknotes so that bills of larger denomination could be printed on the same paper, and a small rotary hand press that spewed out pretty Italian lira at a fast clip. 'I built it myself,' he said, 'to show how easy it is to do.'

Suddenly he turned away from his apparatus, which had been arranged on a table beside Burleigh's desk, dug his hand in his pocket, and came up with some paper money. He separated three bills and handed them to me. One was a familiar \$20 bill – good, solid, U.S. currency. The other was an equally familiar British five-pound note, a sister of the boxful I'd had in Marseilles. The third was a 1,000 franc Swiss banknote.

I examined the twenty on both sides, noted the plate-number on the back and the quality of the engraving on Jackson's portrait on the front. I'd been told years ago to

look at those two things first to determine whether a bill was good. I held it up towards van der Heide.

'This isn't counterfeit,' I said.

'It's as good as any that ever came out of the Bureau of Printing and Engraving in Washington,' he answered. 'There's not a line out of place nor an infinitesimal bit of shading that isn't perfect. The plate that bill was printed from does not vary in any slight degree from those in Washington. But it is counterfeit. So are those other two. That twenty with that serial number and that plate number could not possibly get over to Europe for another month. The reason is that it's just now being printed in America.'

He took the bills and put them back in his pocket. He pranced up and down in front of me. He was officious and contemptuous of me and my opinion. He spoke as though he were explaining something elementary to a backward pupil.

'How do I know? I'll tell you, young man. I know because the ink on that twenty-dollar bill, which you say is not counterfeit, and the ink on the five-pound note and the ink on the Swiss banknote are all identically the same. There is no difference in their chemical formulae, and so all three bills were printed in the same printing plant, which is just a bit unusual, don't you think?'

He had stopped in front of me to make his final point, aiming a stubby finger at my nose. Then he turned abruptly, shook hands with Burleigh, Delong, and Franklin, and left.

Franklin said morosely, 'We're not dealing with amateurs in this business.'

Burleigh said, 'It scares me - anyone who can come up with anything as perfect as those banknotes. . . . Well, let's get back to Connie Chancellor, the minor hoodlum with a future. You know what the plot is, you know what the problems are. You, Chancellor, are going to supply these nabobs of the underworld with the one, single solution to

their one, single problem. You are going to remove their transportation road-block. You are going to show them how and when they can distribute their billions in counterfeit. And, if we are lucky, you may even be entrusted with some of the responsibility of the distribution.

'In that way, Chancellor, you are going to find out for us the brains and the organizers of this conspiracy, the location of their printing plant, and their plans for using this vast wealth. You get us the information and we will act upon it.'

'And I have a whole month to do it in,' I said.

'Well, perhaps not a month,' he replied blandly. 'We hope it will be that long, that's all. You will rejoin your underworld associates, whom you left so suddenly a week ago, on Monday - let me see, that's the sixteenth - and you should be on your way back to America by the middle of September.'

'Or maybe on my way to a cemetery in a pine box.'

'You won't be working alone,' he told me severely.

'Always keep that in mind. How is your nose coming along? And your neck?'

'Healing,' I replied. 'No difficulties there.'

'Fine. Go up to the infirmary, then, and we'll give you your bullet wound. Where would you like to be shot?'

'Shot?'

'You've got to have a wound, you know, to explain your absence. So we can set up your coming-out party. Grenelle will do a fine job, with very little discomfort, he assures me.'

'Very little discomfort to you,' I said.

It was not one of my good days.

IV

The coming-out party was as carefully staged as anything at Delmonico's in the good old days. More so. There was more at stake. There was, in a sense, everything at stake, because PICA had put nearly all their eggs in my basket, and then had thrust it into my hot little hand.

I carried the basket and was in turn carried in a basket into a small private hospital at Dijon. The shooting of the first Connie Chancellor had actually occurred not more than thirty kilometres from Dijon, on the Paris road, and so it was considered that I should be discovered there rather than in Paris. The official paper work had been carefully done and the records planted in Paris, Dijon, and Marseilles with the local police and with the *Sûreté Général*, so that the gang organization, through their informers, could not only find out where I was but could get a fair idea of what had happened to me. The question of whether or not I had talked, and how much, was left open. That was the bait. It was the gang's fear ~~of my~~ breaking under police pressure that would bring the action. What the action would be was anybody's guess. The pessimistic view was that they would send a torpedo to finish me off and thus settle the matter for all time. I was much inclined to the pessimistic view.

I was put in a small room with no view at all on the first floor of the hospital. I was still wearing my nose bandage, and I still had two beautiful black eyes from that operation, but it was considered that the more bandages you have in a hospital, the better. The main wrapping was on my left shoulder, where I had been 'shot' with Dr Grenelle's gentle knife.

I had my wound and I had a pretty story all fixed up to spring on the first ugly-mug who would appear, just so he didn't shoot first and listen afterwards. There was a

guard over me, of course – a couple of country gendarmes, or men who looked like country gendarmes. I didn't know what their instructions were. I had no interest in that. I had enough to remember.

I was left alone for two days. outside of the buck-toothed nurse who took care of me and the gendarmes who looked in every hour to see if I was still there. The bars on the window were as big around as my forearm, so I didn't know where and how they expected me to go. And oh yes! The food! It was down around the bottom of French cuisine, which is about as low as you can get in any language and still survive. I pitied those other patients in that place who had no other reason for being there except that they were sick.

About ten o'clock at night – that's a guess because I didn't have a watch – on 16 August, 1954, there was a knock on my door, and then it was opened quickly and just as quickly closed behind a brand new gendarme, a small, broad, and compact one with an unusually mean face that needed a shave. He stood looking at me for a moment, a nervous hand smoothing the flap of his white pistol holster. Momentary panic. Was this a face I was supposed to know? Was this the moment I had been waiting for, with a nervousness so strong that even I didn't realize how completely helpless I could find myself? Or was he what he appeared, merely a policeman who had wandered into a situation that was none of his business?

I must have sold myself a bill of goods on that latter notion, despite its patent absurdity, because I relaxed and smiled at him.

He didn't relax, nor was there an answering flicker to my smile. 'Chancellor?' he asked. There was a strong accent there that might have been anything.

'He's out,' I said. 'Something I can do for you?'

'Pardon?'

'What do you want?'

'What did you tell them?'

'Nothing.'

'What did they do to you?'

'Plenty.' I pointed to my nose. 'Who you from?'

'Brandeli, of course. Who'd you think?'

'Tell Brandeli I've still got the stuff.'

'Tell him nothing! I'm no errand-boy!' His hand still fumbled with his holster. It was upsetting.

'You're a big shot,' I sneered at him. 'We buy your kind for ten cents a dozen, where I come from.'

He took two strides and was standing over me, scowling viciously. He had the flap of the holster up and his hand on the gun-butt. So I grabbed his wrist and twisted. Out came the gun and I got it with my other hand. It was easy because it was so unexpected. I was a guy lying on a bed because he had a bullet in him, and I wasn't supposed to be able to move that way.

'Sit down,' I told him, waving the gun towards the foot of the bed. He looked at me vacantly for an instant, then sat. His face betrayed no emotion, if he had any.

'Where's Brandeli?' I asked him.

'Out in the car.'

'How'd you get in here?'

'It cost us. Brandeli arranged it.'

'Are those two cops still outside?'

'They went for a walk.'

'Go out to the car. Tell Brandeli I've got your gun. Tell him I've still got the stuff. You're an errand-boy now. Scram.'

He jumped up and went out the door in a hurry. I arranged the pillows and sat up higher in bed, holding the gun under the covers and ready.

The door opened again. The torpedo was back, followed by a second man – Brandeli. I'd seen enough pictures of him. A handsome, decadent face with full, warm lips; soft, woman's eyes; black hair that was carefully waved and

greased with a duck-feather arrangement in the back. Pretty-boy Mario, from Palermo and Chicago. A killer – ladies, men, what have you. Paragraph 13, Dossier 1783: *There is some evidence Brandeli and Chancellor are in conflict. C-rating intelligence report: they quarrelled last year over woman Dolores, dancer at Canard d'Or night club in Montmartre, Paris, who has been living with Brandeli since 1948.*

‘How’s Dolores?’ I asked him.

He grinned at me. ‘You son of a bitch,’ he said. ‘What did you do to Lupe?’

I pulled the gun out from under the covers and showed it to him. He nodded at it, then said, ‘Let’s get the hell out of here. Can you walk?’

I got out of bed and stood up, but shakily. I didn’t have to fake it, after being off my feet for those two days. I had on a chic flannel *robe de nuit* that reached almost to the floor and a nightcap with a tassel on the end of it that added just the right dash to promenade the *rues* of Dijon.

‘~~He’s~~ him,’ Brandeli ordered Lupe.

The gunsels put a clumsy arm around me and we started out. The buck-toothed nurse came slapping down the hall in her 13-triple-A’s and stopped horrified in front of our procession at the door of my room. She spouted a couple of *alors* and then ordered me back to bed in a top-sergeant’s voice.

Brandeli told her it was police business, and indicated Lupe’s uniform. She wasn’t convinced. My condition, she asserted, couldn’t survive such mistreatment.

We moved off and she followed us, down the hall and out the front door to a Citroën parked at the curb, yattering her protests. Lupe helped me in the back seat and Brandeli got in front, gunned the idling motor, and jumped away from the curb like a jack-rabbit. I looked back and saw her standing at the curb, an angry, frustrated look on her

long face. Approaching her from up the street were the two country gendarmes, strolling unhurriedly back to the hospital.

‘What happens back there?’ I asked Brandeli.

He took a difficult corner into a narrower street, going faster than he should have been. ‘All these guys in Dijon are for sale,’ he said. ‘The Boss will fix it. He’ll be glad to if you’ve still got the tin.’

‘I’ve got it.’

‘Where is it?’

‘In good time, junior, in good time.’

Brandeli took his foot off the accelerator and let the car slow down. ‘I’m not asking you, I’m *ordering* you,’ he said nastily.

‘Stow it,’ I said. ‘Fight with me when I get my health back.’

He accepted the way out. He stepped on the gas again and we were on our way out of town. He drove fast and expertly and we reached Paris shortly after midnight. Without conversation. Lupe slept most of the way. My policy was to say as little as possible. The more I kept my mouth closed, the less chance of putting my foot in it. And Brandeli apparently wasn’t accustomed to chatting idly with Connie Chancellor.

We entered Paris on Route 19, crossing the Marne at Charenton. This was a route I was supposed to know, so I kept my eyes open and spotted the various landmarks I’d studied at D-Section. We crossed to the left bank on the Pont d’Austerlitz and shortly afterwards pulled up in front of a large hotel on the Rue du Bac, the Hotel Sicilione. DICA had told me a lot about this hotel.

Brandeli stretched in his seat, then turned around and poked Lupe awake. ‘How you feel?’ he asked me indifferently.

‘Groggy. I better get to bed.’

Lupe helped me out of the car and into the service

entrance of the hotel. That long flannel nightgown wouldn't have looked good in the lobby, in case there were guests about. We went up to the third floor and into a room Brandeli opened with a key from his pocket. It was a bedroom-sitting room done in the French style with period furniture.

A big double day-bed in a corner was turned down. What caught my eye was a stack of American comic books on a table. Lupe helped me to the bed and I got into it. Brandeli stood in the centre of the room, ready for a speech. I'd given Lupe his gun back and he was fingering his holster flap again.

'We weren't supposed to bring you back here,' Brandeli said, 'so I'm taking a chance getting the Boss sore. All I say is, you'd better have that tin.' He nodded to Lupe. 'You stay here. I'll get him.'

Brandeli was gone about five minutes. He came back with a big man in a beautiful silk flowered dressing-gown, patent leather pumps on his feet, and an evening shirt open at the throat. Brandeli arranged a chair for him facing my bed and lit his long cigarette which he took from a gold case. This was Julius Pindar, boss of the Corsicans. He looked at me for a moment out of his small, close-set eyes, then glanced at Lupe. His face just missed being distinguished; instead it gave the impression of grossness. He indicated Lupe with his cigarette and said to Brandeli:

'Get him out of here. Get that uniform off him.' He spoke with the trace of a British accent.

Lupe hurried out, closing the door softly. Brandeli sat in a chair a little behind Pindar. The latter turned his attention to me. 'It was a long and unfriendly scrutiny.'

'What have you got to say for yourself?' he asked.

'The *Sûreté* nailed me outside of Dijon,' I said. 'I tried to out-run them and they shot me. That's about the size of it.'

'So they got the car *and* the gold!' he exploded in a roar. 'You've lost everything!'

I shook my head at him. 'They got nothing,' I said in a conversational tone.

'Well, let's have it,' he said impatiently.

'I was using another car,' I said. 'They got that, and they've probably stripped it down to the wrist-pins by now.'

He leaned back, in his chair and let out his breath.

'Why?' he asked.

'Someone had picked me up going out of Marseilles the first time. I couldn't shake them. That old Jaguar hasn't got much soup. There's a road that goes back to Marseilles by a different route north of Salon, and I took that and went to a garage I know and got another car, a Porche. I switched the plates and got ready to try it again. Meantime I ran into Hannakin in a café on the Canebière while I was waiting for dark.'

'I've heard about that,' he said. 'You were arrested.'

'No trouble, just a small fine.'

'Continue.'

'I got a friend of mine to bring the Jag to Paris and I started north in the Porche. They picked me up again. That's it.'

He took out a new cigarette and Brandeli jumped up and lit it. I couldn't tell whether he liked my story, but it all would hang together beautifully if and when he checked it.

'What the hell were you doing in Marseilles?' he asked suddenly.

'Detoured to visit a friend,' I replied.

'You were ordered to come directly to Paris from Nice,' he stated. 'Are you in the habit of ignoring the orders of Mr Vidal?'

'It wasn't an order,' I countered. 'Frankie and I are friends. He trusts me. I always deliver for him - and I'll

always deliver for you, too. That's more than you can say for some of the stumble-bums you've got working for you.'

His face turned purple with rage and he half-rose from his chair. Brandeli jumped up and stood by his side, ready to go into action. Was this the wrong thing for Connie Chancellor to have said? Had I put my foot in my big mouth the first opportunity that offered to make time with the Boss – or was it normal for him to blow his top? DICA hadn't told me about that detail. . . .

'Watch that nasty mouth of yours!' Brandeli growled at me.

I ignored him. 'Look, Mr Pindar, I haven't lost your shipment. The cops know nothing. I've got the pounds from Hannakin. I've given you one hundred per cent service.'

He continued to fix me with those close-set, mean eyes. 'You've given me nothing but trouble. Where's the gold? Where's the car?'

'A garage on the Rue Lafayette.'

'A garage!' I thought he was going to explode again. 'What the devil is that car doing in a garage? Of all the stupid, asinine—!' He couldn't finish it. He just sat there and fumed.

'It's probably stripped by now,' Brandeli offered.

'No, junior, it isn't stripped,' I said. That brown-nose pretty-boy really annoyed me. 'This garage is owned by a very close friend of mine. I've had a deal with him since last year.'

'Who?' demanded Pindar.

'Name's Duchene. A Frenchman, but he used to work for Frankie in Jersey City.' I omitted the fact that he was now working for Burleigh in Paris.

Pindar pulled out another cigarette and Brandeli lit it for him. That crisis seemed to be passed. Brandeli sat down again. Pindar got up and walked around, angrily pushing the furniture out of his way until he had a straight path between the bed and the door. 'If you're well enough to

come from Dijon to Paris, you're well enough to go get that gold tomorrow,' he said. 'You get that car and bring it around to our warehouse.' He stopped in front of Brandeli and pointed his cigarette at him. 'You go with him. I'm not going to have any more mistakes.'

Then he remembered something else. 'Who's this friend in Marseilles you had to see?'

'A dame,' I said. 'You don't know her.'

'How do you know I don't know her?' he stopped in front of me and licked his lips. 'Does she like a whip?'

I grinned at him. 'I beat the hell out of her,' I said.

He gave me a scowl back. 'Give her name to George,' he said. 'Tell him to get her for me.'

'O.K.,' I said.

He was by the door, getting ready to leave. He turned and looked at me. He said, 'Don't think you're cute, my boy. You haven't fooled me. You'll find out about it tomorrow as soon as we get that car.' He pointed a finger at Brandeli. 'Watch him,' he ordered.

Then he was gone.

It wasn't working out well. In fact, it didn't seem to be working out at all. What did Pindar mean by saying that I hadn't fooled him? Had he been able to see at a glance that I wasn't Connie Chancellor? I don't think that I panic easy, but that's the only interpretation I could put on it that miserable, wakeful night. Brandeli bedded down on a divan and snored loudly. All the traffic on the Rue du Bac seemed to go right through that room. It was a great temptation to get up and run for it. Believe me, I gave a good deal of careful thought to that. What decided me to stick it out was no feeling of loyalty towards VICA. I damned them and all of their bungling works. No, it was Pindar and the challenge he presented to my ego. I know that's a flimsy attitude upon which to stake your life, if the situation was that critical, but that man had succeeded

in arousing in me such an overwhelming animosity that I was determined to do him in the eye. So there was that side of it. I was fighting mad and I wasn't thinking too clearly.

Morning came around, overcast and disagreeable. Brandeli got up, throwing his blanket on the floor, and phoned down for coffee and *croissants*.

'Where are the keys to your apartment?' he demanded. 'I'll send over for your clothes.'

'The cops took everything,' I replied. 'The key's in Dijon with my dough, watch, and two clean handkerchiefs.'

He gave me a look of disgust. 'So, what do you suggest, bright boy?'

'Well, I'll tell you, Mr Brandeli. If I were you and as stupid as you are and I found myself in such a position, I'd bust out crying . . . Why the hell don't you ask the *concierge* to let you in?'

'Be careful,' he warned me. 'Don't talk to me like that.'

'You're just a cream-puff without Pindar to back you up.'

He didn't like it a bit, but he must have recognized that there was some truth in it. He decided to ignore me. He picked up the phone and talked to Lupe, giving detailed instructions about going to my apartment and getting my apparel. The breakfast arrived and we ate in silence. Pindar phoned about nine and Brandeli gave him a full report. Then Lupe came in with my clothes packed carelessly in a very nice pigskin bag. I got dressed. I still felt a bit rocky, but it was nothing that wouldn't pass when I got walking around. Lupe had packed a razor and I shaved. I got fussing with the bandage on my nose and decided to take it off. There was one scar that showed up red, but it didn't look too bad. Brandeli reluctantly loaned me his sunglasses, and I was ready for the boulevards.

This Connie Chancellor was a snappy dresser. He wore a light-weight brown suit, a Charvet tie, and a brown homburg. His hand-made, two-toned shoes were too tight

– they were killing me – and I wondered why all the brains of DICA and a former ship's officer hadn't thought of that. 'These damned shoes!' I said. 'They never did fit me. We go to a shoe store first.'

'The hell we do.'

'The hell we don't!' We exchanged glares and I won out because I had something more pressing to feed my anger. We stopped at a store on the Grands Boulevards where I got a pair of loafers, then drove on to the Rue Lafayette and the garage of M. Duchene.

This was outwardly like any Paris garage, but it had been used for some years, as I had been told, as a stop on the DICA underground to transport personnel in and out of France. Duchene himself, a dapper and typical French businessman, came to greet us, called me Connie familiarly, and gave his atrocious English a workout. I introduced Brandeli as a business associate. Duchene nodded wisely, then led us to the Jaguar, which was in the back of the garage covered with a tarpaulin. He ordered a workman to remove the cover and we got in. I drove out of the garage, after we both shook hands with Duchene, and followed Brandeli's directions to the warehouse, which was near the Porte de Versailles, on the other side of Paris. We drove through a gate in a high stone wall and through the double doors of the warehouse building which were opened for us by Lupe.

Pindar was there, standing beside a big new Cadillac in dark blue, talking to a man in the back seat. The latter had a long, thin face and wore a tall black hat and a scarf around his neck, as though he feared draughts. I'd seen plenty of pictures of him and many fuzzy movie clips. Adolph Lauderbach. There was a uniformed chauffeur in the front seat. Near the front of the car stood a tough guy with a Sten gun cradled in his arm. Against the far wall of the huge room were three gas-furnace cookers with metal pots on top and on the floor in front of them was a

layout of shallow boxes that looked as though they contained sand-moulds for hot metal. Two workmen at that end of the room and the guard with the Sten gun converged on the Jaguar as I came to a stop.

Brandeli and I got out and he walked quickly to Pindar. I waited by the car, getting out of the way of the workmen who immediately started to take it apart. Another man wheeled in a platform with a delicate scale on it, and as the various bits and pieces of the Jaguar were dismantled, they were placed on the scale, weighed, and the weight checked with one list, then entered on another. Among the parts weighed were nuts and bolts, the brackets holding the bumpers, the engine fan, sections of the exhaust pipe, the engine valve-covers, body brackets, sections of frame-reinforcing, and all the tools from a kit in the rear deck. There was a large suitcase back there and one of the men put it near me. Then they jacked up the car, took off the wheels, dismantled the tyres, and added the wheels to their collection.

Brandeli and Pindar strolled over to my side. They watched the workmen for a moment, then Pindar checked on the weighing figures on both lists. He came back to where I was standing, a puzzled look on his face.

'It seems to be checking out,' he said.

I shrugged at him.

'Could I have been wrong about you?' he demanded.

'Looks like you were,' I replied.

'I don't get it,' he said. 'You've had that car knocking all over Marseilles and Paris. You've had it in and out of two garages we know nothing about, yet all the stuff is still on it. What sort of game are you playing?'

'This isn't a game. You wanted the car delivered and I've delivered it. I told you that last night.'

'You come up and see me in a few days,' he said. 'I want to talk to you. And bring those English pounds you got from Hannakin. You need any money now?'

'The cops cleaned me out,' I said. 'I could use some.'

He took a large wad of 10,000 franc notes from his pocket and handed them to me. 'You'd better get back to bed,' he said. 'Brandeli will take you home.'

Brandeli picked up the suitcase without any comment and led me out a side door of the warehouse to a courtyard where his car was parked. He put the suitcase in back and I got in front beside him. He drove by back streets to the Rue Vaugirard and along that to the Boulevard Raspail, where he turned left for a few blocks, drawing up in front of a large apartment building.

He'd made some slight effort to be friendly, asking me how I felt and commenting on the weather. I'd kept my answers short. He carried my suitcase to the apartment house door and I followed. I'd been briefed on the address, of course. I was very curious to see this home of Connie Chancellor. We entered a courtyard and stopped by the *concierge's* lodge where I was given a sour 'hello' by a frowsy dame in a dirty apron. I told her in my halting French that I'd lost my key and asked her to open my door for me. She led the way to a rear building in the court and we three crowded into a small, creaking elevator that didn't quite make the top floor. It stopped a foot and a half short. We climbed out and the *concierge* inserted a key from a large ring into the nearest door. She held it open for us while we entered, and then shut it with a bang.

Brandeli put my bag down in the hall and preceded me into the living room. It was a large room with two tall windows overlooking rooftops. The furniture was of good quality and quietly modern. There was a small bar in one corner of the room and the shelves behind it were crowded with bottles of whisky and liqueurs. There was a large couch in another corner piled with pillows and there was a coffee table in front of it. A seduction nook. It badly needed a blonde.

Brandeli headed for the bar. 'How about a drink?' he asked.

'Help yourself. I'll pass it.'

I left him dumping scotch into a glass and went exploring. The bedroom had a large double bed, mirrors on two walls, a whopping nude on a third, and windows on the fourth. The bathroom was modern and messy. It looked as though the last occupant had been a very untidy woman who had left in a hurry, spilling her powder here and there and smearing the towels with lipstick. There was a small dressing room off the bathroom and its closets had a half dozen suits hanging, rows of those tight shoes, and drawers full of shirts and underwear. I returned to the living room.

'What'd you do with Yvonne?' Brandeli asked. He was lounging in the love-nook with a highball.

Nobody'd told me about Yvonne. 'She's around somewhere,' I said. 'Look, junior, I'm going to have to get to bed. I don't feel too hot.'

He got up and took a solid swig from his glass. 'You need someone to feed you, to take care of you,' he said.

'I'll call Judy,' I said.

'That tramp!' he exclaimed. 'Say, didn't the Boss tell you to lay off her? She's poison. Two guys she's gone around with have got bumped off.'

'Three,' I said. 'You forgot Connie Chancellor.'

'Yeah,' he said, putting his glass down on the bar, 'big joke! You think you're so damned good! Let me tell you, these cops have gone crazy killing people. Look at the way they plugged you. And I'll give you five, two and even that that dame is tied with them somewhere. That's what the Boss thinks.'

'No she isn't,' I said. 'I know her that well. Anyway, she's coming up here.'

'That's your funeral,' he said. He walked out with a wave of the hand, and after I'd heard the elevator start down,

I went to the bedroom and phoned one of the dozen or so numbers that could get me anything from a pack of cigarettes to a regiment of tanks. I told the female voice that answered that Connie Chancellor wanted Judy Deprez *chez lui* and hung up. Then I tried on all the shoes in the closet but I couldn't find one pair I could wear. A bell rang somewhere and I figured it was Judy-on-the-spot at the front door. I opened it up and there were two of the strangest looking characters I'd ever seen standing fidgeting on my stoop. One was a tall, unhealthy looking man with a bulbous nose and his skin at least two sizes too big for him. It hung in folds from his jowls and his neck, and there were great loose bags under his eyes that gave him a look of great sadness. His companion, who hid behind him like a shadow, was a small man with a mean, rat-face and a thin moustache trimmed in the Spanish style. They both eyed me suspiciously for a moment, then came brushing by me into the entrance hall. They kept their faces towards me and stopped and looked at me while I closed the door. Rat-face had a large bulge under his coat that should have been a gun.

'You have disappointed us, Mr Chancellor,' said the tall one. He spoke with a strong German accent and his voice sounded hurt. 'I hope you will forgive us for coming here, but we had to see you. We made sure you were alone.'

I led them into the living room. I wondered what sort of a deal this was that Chancellor had gotten himself involved in. It didn't look pleasant. They took chairs side by side and declined my offer to mix them drinks. There was nothing friendly in their attitudes. I sat on the couch, lit a cigarette, and waited for them to talk.

'You are going to tell us what happened?' asked the tall one finally.

'Maybe. What do you want to know?'

They exchanged a glance. Rat-face patted his coat bulge

and the tall one shook his head at him. 'You had better give us the whole story,' he said. 'What happened to the car and the gold? We are very, very disappointed. We are paying you well, you know.'

My mind shifted into high and began to race with this bit of information. The car and the gold. That would be the Jaguar. They wanted it. They had expected it. It appeared that they had paid for it. So what had Chancellor done, sold out Pindar? Is that why Pindar had been so unfriendly, because he had suspected? And if Pindar was the big racket boss of France, then who were these two? Whom did they represent?

'I had trouble with the police near Dijon,' I said. 'They shot me and then kept me in a hospital for a week. Pindar got me out of it. He bought my way out.'

The tall one nodded over this information. 'Where were you shot?' he said.

I started to unbutton my shirt to show him. When I looked up, I saw that Rat-face had his gun on me. It was a good old U.S. Army Colt .45.

The tall one got out of his chair and examined the bandage, then sat down again. 'Well, so the police got the car?'

'No, Pindar got it. I was in another car when I was shot. A friend drove the Jaguar to Paris from Marseilles. I had to give it to Pindar.'

'What were you doing in Marseilles?'

There was that old question again. What was I doing in Marseilles? Well, I was waiting for my ship to sail. I was minding my own business and not smuggling gold and not putting my life on the line in some idiotic police melodrama every time the doorbell rang. 'I went there to get a dish of *bouillabaisse*,' I said.

Rat-face jumped out of his chair and came over to me. He held the gun on me loosely with one hand and slapped my face hard with the other.

'Answer Mr Gratz polite,' he growled at me. He too spoke with a German accent.

'Now Fritz, be calm, like I am,' said Mr Gratz reprovingly. Fritz returned to his chair, scowling at me. 'Well,' continued Mr Gratz, 'then what were you doing in Marseilles?'

'Visiting a friend,' I said. 'I know a girl there.'

'And you didn't see Cassegrain or Hannakin?'

'I saw Hannakin,' I admitted.

'So! So! He saw Hannakin! He admits it!'

They both laughed, short, nasty, barking laughs. 'And did he give you any money, Mr Chancellor?' Gratz asked.

'Yes,' I said. 'A box of five-pound notes.'

'I'll take them,' said Gratz.

'You'll take hell,' I said. 'Stop being stupid!'

That did it. Fritz jumped up and came rushing at me. He swung his arm for another slap, but he was moving too fast and he was off balance. I ducked under his hand at the last instant and grabbed his gun. I twisted it out of his hand with a motion DICA had taught me, then pushed him away from me and put the gun on the two of them.

Judy came in and stood in the doorway, looking at the tableau. She was holding a key in her hand. I wondered why I hadn't thought of that before.

'I didn't know you had a key,' I said.

V

Judy and I had a nice meeting with Herr Gratz and his boy Fritz. There were no raised voices and little vituperation. Judy apparently didn't know anything about them, which meant that DICA didn't either. I let her do most of the talking, since she knew her way about such a labyrinth much better than I.

'I am handling Mr Chancellor's affairs now,' she told Gratz after the preliminary sparring had given her the pitch. 'You'd better tell me all about your deal with him.'

'Mr Chancellor knows,' said Gratz morosely. 'Ask him.'

'No, you tell her,' I said, waving the gun. 'I'd like to hear your version of it.'

'That maybe I'd cheated you?' he asked.

'She'll decide. She can judge that.'

He sighed heavily. 'There's not enough trust in the world,' he said. 'Too much suspicion. . . . So, I gave you ninety million francs down payment for the Jaguar. And ninety million more I am to give you when it is delivered. That is one hundred and eighty million francs for the gold.'

'About half enough,' said Judy. 'Yes, just about half.'

'But I have to make a profit!' exclaimed Gratz. 'And look at the risk I am taking, coming to Paris!'

'Coming to Paris from where, Mr Gratz?'

'Well, I have my little place here – my little shop. That is not what I mean. I am not supposed to operate here just yet.'

'But you do have your little shop here and you do operate here. No, we are not going to pay you for that, Mr Gratz.'

He looked at her unhappily for a moment, then turned to Fritz and said a few words in German in an undertone. Fritz nodded. Then he spoke to me. 'Now the gold is gone and you have my ninety million francs. What are you going to do about that, Mr Chancellor?'

'You'll get the gold,' Judy spoke up. 'You'll get eight thousand, two hundred ounces and you will pay us the other ninety million francs when it is delivered.'

Gratz dropped his head in his hands and moaned. 'That is robbery!' he cried. 'I cannot do business at that price!'

'Take it or leave it,' said Judy.

He looked at me accusingly. 'That was not our agreement,' he said. 'What about that, Mr Chancellor?'

'You'll have to deal with her. She's the boss,' I replied.

'Make it nine thousand ounces at least,' he pleaded.

'O.K.,' she said, getting up. 'Nine thousand. We'll have it for you next week.'

Gratz sat there for a moment. He seemed to be looking at my feet. Then he raised his eyes to mine. 'You are not wearing my shoes, Mr Chancellor,' he said.

Crazy people. Of course I wasn't wearing *his* shoes. I was wearing my own loafers.

'No, I suppose I'm not,' I agreed.

'Well,' he said, 'why not?'

A good question. 'I bought these this morning,' I said.

He rose with dignity. He was angry now. He glared at me and Fritz glared at me. He stalked to me and held out his hand. 'I will take Fritz's gun now,' he said. I handed it to him. He put it in his coat pocket, turned abruptly and started for the door, taking Fritz by the arm on the way.

I followed them into the hall and held the door open while the two of them walked out. Fritz pushed the bell for the elevator and Gratz turned to me and gave me a withering look.

'My shoes are not good enough for you?' he demanded.

Then it came to me. like the sun bursting through the clouds. He was a *shoemaker*, and it was he who had fashioned all of that tight, useless footwear in Chancellor's closet!

'I've been having trouble with my feet,' I told him apologetically. 'I'll be in to see you in a few days and order some more shoes, perhaps a bit more roomy.'

That seemed to appease him only slightly. 'Those shoes you have are roomy enough,' he said with an edge to his voice. But the elevator had arrived by then, and I closed the door on that discussion.

Back in the living room, Judy was mixing herself a high-ball. 'You want one?' she asked.

I shook my head. 'Can we get them tailed right away?' I asked. 'I've got to know where that guy's shop is.'

'I've phoned already,' she said. 'We've got a radio car just up the block and they'll pick them up. Well, what's this all about?'

'You know as much as I do. They showed up about a half hour ago and started pushing me around. Looks like Chancellor was selling out Pindar, which is one sweet mess! How the hell did he expect to get away with that?'

'Oh, he'd have some sort of plan all worked out,' she replied indifferently. 'You'll find out about it in due course.'

'I'll find out about it! How about Pindar and his boys, when *they* find out about it! I'll have more lead in me than a mechanical pencil!'

'Simmer down,' she advised. 'We'll get Gratz his gold and you'll be off the hook. You've done fine so far.'

'It's a damned impossible mess! Nobody can untangle it!'

'Otherwise you're alive and healthy and living off the fat of the land. How'd you like that Pindar?'

'A real sweetheart! And by the way, he thinks you're poison.'

'So? I *know* he's poison.'

'He's got you taped with some sort of police tie-up.'

That worried her. She sipped her drink in silence. We were sitting on the two bar stools, and she turned around and faced me. 'I've had a feeling for a long time that something was going to happen to me,' she said. 'It's as though there was no one left I could trust – that I could turn to.'

'You've always got DICA,' I said. 'They'll keep you warm, little girl.'

'Yeah, DICA. They're a great consolation. . . . Do you realize what would happen to us all if there were just one person in that precious organization who turned traitor?'

'Now *that's* something to worry about, as if I didn't have enough!'

'Well, you never know . . . I don't know whether it's that or what. I've got this feeling. I've had it for weeks, ever

since we started working on this counterfeiting thing. Probably it's just Pindar. How'd you find out he's suspicious of me?

'Brandeli was talking.'

'You be careful of Brandeli, Connie. He doesn't like you at all.'

'I know about that. You be careful of Pindar. It seems to me you're the one who's in trouble.'

She shrugged. 'What's there to do?' She looked around the room that must have been so familiar to her. She put her hand on mine. 'Was Gratz your only problem?'

'No, he arrived after I'd called. I'm supposed to be sick. You've got to take care of me.'

She got up and walked towards the door. 'I'll get you a maid and get this place organized,' she said. 'I'd better not stay here.'

I followed her out. 'Ghosts bother you?' I asked.

Nothing happened for a couple of days. Judy found me a non-DICA maid to come in mornings and clean up the place and cook me breakfast and luncheon. I didn't hear from Pindar or Brandeli or DICA, or any of those others I'd met or heard of. There was one mysterious phone call late the first night I was in the apartment. It was an angry female voice spouting machine-gun French. I listened for a while, then interrupted with a *mais alors* and said in English, 'What can I do for you, sweetie-pie?' The answer to that was unexpected. 'You can go to hell,' she said, and hung up.

I'd unpacked Chancellor's bag that was in the trunk of the Jaguar, and found a haul there that kept me busy for several hours. DICA had put in the box of five-quid notes from Marseilles and all of his personal belongings taken from Chancellor's body, including his money, the missing keys, his watch. There was an address book I hadn't seen before, buried in a pocket. I wondered why it had been

missed. It was the first evidence that somebody had been careless and it gave me an unhappy feeling. If they'd neglected that, then what else had they overlooked?

I studied it carefully and found several names there I'd not heard of before, including the Yvonne mentioned by Brandeli. She was Yvonne Georgie and she was an Elysée telephone number, but no address. There was also a second telephone number for Diane Gilbert besides the one I knew, and the address of Herman Gratz and his boy Fritz, which had been given to me earlier by DICA. Those were the names I could tie up with something. But how about the rest that I could not? How about Willy Dorffman in Frankfurt, and who was Montgomery Roach, care of the National City Bank, Paris?

Then I thought again of that affair with Gratz and the idiocy of the whole DICA scheme suddenly closed in on me like one of those fogs you meet off Block Island in the fall. And like navigating in a fog, I was supposed to feel my way blindly through all of the double-dealing of this crooked Chancellor, through the animosity of Gratz and the hate of Pindar and the God-knows-what attitude of what hoodlum, racketeer, *poule de luxe*, and odd-ball who populated this murdering underworld. Was it worth it, to risk my life over the vague fears of a vague police organization that there was some terrible menace afoot? The answer was a great big NO – and yet, I didn't want to give up now, until I had found out just a little bit more; until I had satisfied myself that the entire thing was poppycock. Hell, I was getting as silly as the rest of them!

I copied all the information out of the address book that I thought I'd need, then put it in an envelope with a nasty note addressed to Captain Burleigh, and went out to make a DICA contact. This was my first, outside of the telephone and Judy and I approached it with some cynicism. 'Cops and robbers,' I said to myself. 'So let's play games.'

I got a cab to the Café Select on the Boulevard St Germain and took a table on the terrace. I ordered a *café noir* and a *fine* on the side. I put the sugar in my coffee and let the spoon stick up in the cup after I'd stirred it. Then I drank the *fine* and put the empty glass near the coffee so that the top of the spoon touched it. Then I sat back and looked around. Two American girls at a nearby table were giving me the eye and giggling. A Frenchman at the table beside mine was trying to disentangle his dog's leash from his chair. Out on the sidewalk a man with a guide's cap on was following a middle-aged British couple, trying to sell them on a sightseeing tour of Paris. Then all of a sudden there was a news vendor beside me offering me a *France-Soir*. I looked up at his tired old face with rheumy eyes and thought that here was another one who had a stinker of a job. '*Quelle date?*' I asked him. '*Treize,*' he replied. Which was crazy because it was the nineteenth.

I took the envelope with the address book and the message in it from my pocket and slipped it to his hand under the newspaper as I took it. The envelope disappeared deftly into a pocket. I gave him a fifty-franc piece and told him to keep the change.

He bowed and thanked me and was off. The Frenchman had got the leash untangled and he stood up, glaring absently at his dog. The two American girls still giggled. I left the money for my *café* and *fine* and got away from there. I needed some exercise. I walked over to the right bank and turned along the Rue St Honoré. I didn't have anything in mind except the walk, but there was something on the edge of my consciousness that kept nagging me. It had to do with the Rue St Honoré. As I passed the Rue de la Sourdiere it suddenly came to me. Gratz. His shop was on this side street just off the Rue St Honoré.

I found it only a few paces on and stopped and looked in one of the two large and dusty windows. This one had a display of men's shoes of half a dozen styles, a pair of

black half-Wellingtons, and two pairs of brown riding boots. The name on the window was Gratz Ltd and under that was a list of royalty that had once trod its red carpets in Gratz shoes. Very impressive. I went in, noticing that the other window was devoted to the more delicate creations of the high-heeled sex.

I stepped into a scene of confusion. An elderly dowager with many blond curls surmounted by a feather hat and with a mink coat dripping from her fat shoulders was stamping about in odd shoes and screaming imprecations in raucous French at a little man who was on his knees, very much like a Moslem at eventide. He was pointing with a helpless finger to a contour drawn on a large sheet of paper spread on the floor before him. Mr Gratz, himself, dressed in white coat and looking very much like a surgeon coming to the rescue in the operating theatre, was hurrying down a spiral stair and muttering words of sympathy to the dowager. A large woman and a pretty girl were standing behind a counter and wringing their hands.

Then the dowager shot past me and out into the street, still wearing the odd shoes. I saw the back end of her mink as she was helped into a Cadillac at the curb by a uniformed driver. I turned back to Mr Gratz. His sad face looked sadder than ever. He nodded to me, then leaned over and helped the little man to his feet. 'Don't you worry, Jacob, it was her fault, not yours,' he said. 'She will be back tomorrow and she will apologize.'

Jacob picked up his foot-chart and headed for the stairs. Gratz turned back to me. He put out a skinny hand and I shook it. 'So, you have come?' he said.

'I want one pair of good walking shoes,' I said.

'Now I know you are fooling, Mr Chancellor,' he said. 'You have *three* pairs of good walking shoes.'

'They don't feel comfortable any more. My foot must have changed.'

'That sometimes happens, but I don't think it could

happen so quick.' He turned to the woman behind the counter. 'Mary, get out Mr Chancellor's charts and models.'

She had apparently anticipated the order, for the pretty girl brought them immediately. There was a roll of charts and two models of my feet carved in wood. I was fascinated by them. I picked one up and looked at it. Dimensions were marked all over it in ink. It was obviously exact, a careful reproduction of the foot of Connie Chancellor.

'Sit down please and I will take off your shoes,' said Mr Gratz.

I started to sit down, and then it came to me. Suddenly I was confronted by the obvious – that there would be many small differences between my foot and the model; that most of the dimensions would be different. Here in my hand was a solid proof that I was not Connie Chancellor.

I straightened up and moved away from the chair. 'I've changed my mind,' I said. 'I'll order the shoes another day.' I handed the model back to Gratz.

He took it without a word and edged close behind me to open the door for me. There were no remonstrances. He wasn't acting a bit surprised.

'I'll see you soon,' I said. 'Next week – about Wednesday.' I could feel perspiration between my shoulder blades and I was certain that I was blushing.

'It is wise for you not to permit anyone to measure your feet,' he said in my ear. 'And the gold, *Mister* Chancellor. I'm afraid that I shall now need the full 14,000 ounces. You tell that girl.'

The panic wore off along the Rue de Rivoli, where I found myself walking fast. I slowed down and got my mind back to the track. This was DICA's problem, not mine, I told myself. If DICA couldn't take care of Gratz then they shouldn't be in this business at all, I told myself. And Gratz himself was interested only in the gold; in getting twice his money's worth. Chancellor meant nothing to

him. He was an independent operator, not tied up with the Paris gang organization, so what difference could it make to him whether I was Chancellor or an impostor, so long as he made his profit? I told myself all that – but I didn't believe it. At best, it could be only partly true, because every dealer in gold and other illicit goods on such a large scale would have to have some sort of tie-up or pipe-line to the top of the gang organization or he wouldn't last an hour. He couldn't buy or sell or live without the protection and approval of someone at the top.

So he had me, right where the hair was short. He had me and he had his avarice, and so it was going to cost somebody. That's what it would boil down to. I would have to pay. And maybe, just maybe, he wouldn't blow any whistles so long as the money rolled in. I stopped and looked in a window which displayed a lot of pretty underthings for milady but principally, for my benefit, a painting of a pink nude in a pink bathtub dreaming of a white Christmas.

Somebody was standing beside me. A woman. Chanel No. 5. I disentangled my eyes from the nude and sneaked a look. She was about so high and was wearing a funny little suede hat with a tassel hanging from a soft peak that fell over the back of her neat brown curls. I caught a glint of red in her hair before she turned her face up to mine and scowled at me. It was a beautiful face. Also, it was very familiar, although right at that moment I wasn't casting about for a name to attach to it. I was just being pleasantly fascinated.

'You are a liar and a cheat,' she said. Her accent was heavy, the words were only a near approximation, but I got them all right.

'Me?' I asked.

'Yes, you! All your promises!' She was angry and getting angrier. Several people had stopped and were looking at us, and I realized that her voice had risen to a clear, loud

note on those last words. 'I will never see you again!' she continued, clearer and louder.

'Then the name that matched that face came to me. Diane Gilbert. So this was Diane! I put a hand out to her arm and felt her smooth, warm flesh for an instant under the silk of her sleeve until she jerked away from me as though I were a repulsive insect. 'Please, Diane,' I said, 'can't we go somewhere and talk?'

'Never!' she said dramatically. Then she turned on her heel and was off. I watched her swinging away out of my life and I felt a great sadness. This was a woman! Those pictures of her had captured none of that charged personality, none of her incisive mood, and very little of her rare appealing beauty. There was nothing in them of the music of her voice and the delicious contours of her mouth when she formed those unfamiliar English words. . . . Or was I being romantic and extravagant? Well, I liked her. I liked everything about her. She was just the size and shape of a woman that I wanted for my own.

So I walked on back to my apartment thinking of Diane, across the Place du Carrousel and the Pont Royal and past the Sicilione Hotel on the Rue du Bac. Outside the hotel a porter was unloading a black Oldsmobile with New York licence plates on it. My *concierge* handed me a letter as I passed her lodge and I stuck it in my pocket without looking at it. What was the matter with me? Wasn't I curious about anything?

The maid was getting ready to leave. She told me I had had two phone calls. She had written a name on a pad and she showed it to me. 'Branlie.' I thanked her and got her out. I dialled the Sicilione and asked for Mr Brandeli. He came on almost immediately.

'You up and around?' he asked.

'Yeah. Went for a walk.'

'Get over here, then. The Boss wants you.'

'O.K.'

I got the box of pound notes from a closet and was half way out the door when my hand encountered the letter in my pocket. I returned to the living room and read it. The envelope was postmarked from Constantinople. There was no return address on the envelope or on the letter. It read:

'Meet you at your girl's apartment Thursday night around one o'clock. This is the payoff. Willy.'

Fine. This was Thursday. At one a.m., I had an appointment with Mr Willy Dorffman for the payoff at my girl's apartment. Simple, clear, concise. No chance for making any mistakes there. But – what girl?

I went out to a *tabac* on the corner and got on the phone right away. I dialled an Archive number that wasn't safe to call from my apartment. A man's voice said a bored 'Allo.'

'Geneva,' I said.

'O.K. Geneva.'

'Set up a one-twenty. Eight o'clock.'

'Difficult. It's a busy night.'

'To hell with that. Set it up.'

I banged the phone on the hook and went out. I walked to the Sicilione and asked the clerk if I could see Mr Brandeli.

'Certainly, Mr Chancellor. He's expecting you. Go right up to room 73.'

I took the elevator and went up to 73. Brandeli opened the door for me and I went in. He was wearing a silk dressing gown with wide green and white awning stripes. A dark, mean-looking dame with a white towel around her head and nothing on but a black, lace-trimmed slip came out of the bathroom. She stopped and eyed me with a good deal of frank speculation. Dolores, the dancer.

I nodded at her. 'Hi,' I said.

Brandeli was taking off his dressing gown. 'Be with you in a minute,' he said.

Dolores stuck her nose in the air and went back into the bathroom, slamming the door.

'What's that all about?' I asked.

Brandeli was putting on his coat. 'As if you didn't know!' He walked to the door and opened it. 'Come on, bright boy, the Boss is waiting.'

We took the elevator to the top floor and got out in front of a huge oak door, the only one off that hallway. Brandeli pressed a bell and the door was opened by a uniformed butler with white gloves. We entered a huge foyer with enough antique furniture in it to stock a Madison Avenue window. The butler led us down a long hall, past a huge living room on one side and a dining room almost as large on the other, and into a small study. French doors opened onto a spacious terrace and lounging out there in slacks and a loud sports coat, smoking a big new cigar, was Pindar. The balcony overlooked a court planted with trees, shrubs, and grass. We were higher than most of the buildings surrounding the court, and there were no windows that looked down on us. There was a low table by Pindar's chair and on it was a highball and a pair of powerful binoculars. I put the box of five-pound notes on the table next to the binoculars.

Pindar said, 'Sit down, Chancellor,' indicating a wicker chair facing his own. He waved a hand at Brandeli. 'Wait for us in the study. And close the door.'

Brandeli left us and I sat.

'Something to drink?' Pindar asked.

'No thanks. Too early.'

'That was a good job you did on the car. Better than any of us expected. The Chief is particularly pleased and he's coming up here to meet you.' He glared at me, his look completely belying the friendly import of his words. 'I was giving odds you were going to double-cross us.'

'Why should I?' I asked, sitting back and lighting a cigar.

'Why should you! To save your own filthy neck, that's why! Because you haven't the guts to face up to Vidal, that's why!'

He'd lost me completely. I shouldn't have asked that question. Now I didn't know what the hell he was talking about.

'Vidal doesn't bother me,' I said.

He sat up and looked at me. Then he got to his feet and started walking around. He picked up the binoculars and stared intently through them at a window across the court and below. 'Why the hell doesn't that blonde get down to business?' he said testily. Then he came back to the table and put the binoculars down. 'What's come over you?' he asked me. 'You're not the big-mouthed Chancellor we used to know – or are you?'

'The same Chancellor,' I said. 'Maybe I've learned a few things.'

'I should say you have!' he sat down again. He took the lid off the box of money and looked at the bills absently. There was a knock on the terrace door and the butler opened it. The same man with the long, thin face whom I had seen in the car in the warehouse came on to the terrace. Lauderbach. He was wearing the same tall black hat and scarf around his neck. Now I had a close look at him. His eyes were bright and alive and gave unusual animation to the upper half of his face. But down under his aquiline nose was the cruellest mouth I'd ever seen, and beneath that was a square, stubborn jaw. He looked like a ruthless pirate with, perhaps, a sense of humour, but not the kind of humour that normal people would appreciate.

Pindar and I got up. Pindar introduced me. 'Chancellor,' he said, 'this is Mr Lauderbach. Sit down, sir. I believe you will find this a comfortable chair.' He arranged a wicker chair for his guest, who shook my hand briefly, then we all sat.

Pindar said, 'It was nice of you to come up here, Adolph. Can I offer you a drink?'

'No, thank you,' said Lauderbach. He spoke with a decided British accent. He turned to me. 'I hear you are seeing Willy Dorffman,' he said.

'Yes,' I replied, 'I know him.'

'Keep away from him,' he warned. 'I want you to have nothing to do with him.'

'Yes, sir,' I replied.

'Did you hear me? I mean it!'

'Yes, sir.'

'Good. Now what have you to say for yourself?'

An excellent question. What did I have to say for myself? Should I tell him about Marseilles or about getting shot or about the tight shoes or about running into Diane on the Rue de Rivoli? . . . 'I'd like to stay over here and work with you,' I said, with sudden inspiration.

'What can you do?'

'I can transport anything for you. I can build you a system to cover all of Europe, and even America, if you want that.'

'You can organize such a system!' He gave me a cynical laugh, then turned his head to Pindar. 'Is this your idea?' he demanded angrily.

Pindar swung his legs to the floor and scowled at me. 'What are you talking about?' he asked.

'Transportation,' I said. 'Using modern methods.'

'What modern methods?' asked Lauderbach.

'Aeroplanes and ships, in combination. Helicopters to bring the stuff in to airports. Helicopters to take cargoes out to the ships. Big cargo planes and parachute drops, instead of those small, fast jobs you are using now that get picked up at every airport. Look, your people are going about this all wrong. Speed doesn't mean anything. What good is a plane that can do four or five hundred miles an hour, when it gets nailed on the ground standing

still? Who's going to chase it in the air? Why does it have to be fast? I tell you some hot pilots have sold you a bill of goods.'

'You get out of here!' Pindar roared at me, jumping to his feet.

I started to get up. 'No, Julius, listen to him,' said Lauderbach. 'I think the boy has a bit of an idea' . . . he turned to me. 'What else?'

'A good ground organization to run things. Good communications. That's what we've got to have first, a safe way of passing orders and information.'

'How would you do that?' he asked.

'The most obvious way. The telephone. Some simple code is all we need, and we change it every few days. No radios. You know why you lose all your shipments now? Because every radio message you send is intercepted and decoded in five minutes.'

'How do you know that?'

'I don't know it. I assume it. It's the only sensible deduction that accounts for what happens every time one of your planes takes off and radios its destination.'

'I wouldn't be surprised,' he said. Then he searched my face with his beady eyes for a moment. He got to his feet and straightened his hat. 'Have dinner with me tonight. I wish to hear more about this.' He bowed to Pindar. 'Send him over at eight,' he said.

'Better make it eight-thirty, Mr Lauderbach,' I said. 'I have a previous engagement I'm going to have to break.'

'All right,' he said, 'eight-fifteen, then.' Give a little, take a little. He had to bargain even on the time.

Pindar started pacing as soon as he had gone. He stopped in front of me and shook his head. 'Where'd you ever get such ideas?' he demanded.

'What ideas?'

'Damn it, planes! Transportation! What do you know about such things?'

'Anybody could figure it out,' I said. 'That car I brought over was doing it the hard way. If we'd had the right sort of plane, we could have flown over a ton of gold.'

He shook his head at me again. 'I don't get it. You were always a playboy with a loud mouth and nothing on your mind but females. What's come over you?'

I couldn't think of an answer. I sat and smiled at him, but he wasn't buying any social amenities.

'What about that Judy Deprez?' he barked at me.

'I see her now and then.'

'You damned fool! She's the one got you shot. She's in with the police. I've told you that before.'

'She's cute,' I said. It was the kind of silly remark I supposed Chancellor would have made. It touched off a fuse. He stopped in front of me and glared at me with disgust.

'You *maquereau*!' he said, loud. 'When we find out for sure about her! . . .' His thick hands grabbed the back of a wicker chair and he gave a sudden powerful twist. There was a crack, like the breaking of a neck.

VI

I stopped in another *tabac* on my way back to my apartment and called the Archive number again. The same bored voice answered.

'Geneva,' I said. 'How about the one-twenty?'

'Eight o'clock, Cour Carrée – that's the courtyard of the Louvre. Franklin for sure.'

'Move it up ten minutes. Time's pressing.'

'I'll try.'

I hung up and went back to my apartment to change my clothes. I put on a dark suit and the only quiet tie in the closet, a blue and white Charvet. Then I went out and

got a cab on the corner and rode to the entrance of the Cour Carrée on the Rue Royale. My watch said eleven to eight. I paid the cab and walked into the courtyard. A dozen steps in, someone suddenly took my arm. It was Franklin. We continued walking, not too fast, through the courtyard and across the Pont des Arts.

‘What about Willy Dorffman?’ I asked him.

‘Narcotics,’ he replied. ‘Works with an organization out of Germany and Belgium. They use Turkish suppliers mostly, but they’ve been getting some stuff from the Russians across the German border. Lots of money behind them. They’ve got a connection at the top, but we’ve been unable to find it.’

I handed him the letter from Willy and we stopped an instant while he read it. The sun had just about set, but there was still plenty of light. I looked down at the smooth-flowing Seine. A *bateau mouche* was approaching the bridge, loaded with sightseers. Franklin handed me the letter and we walked on.

‘That damned Chancellor,’ he said, voicing my own feelings exactly. ‘Well, we’ll have to find out who the girl is, for you. Obviously not Judy. She’s never met Willy and knows nothing about him.’

‘So, how about Gratz?’

‘An old-timer. Used to be tied up with Dido, who is now back in Corsica. He was a big operator for the Nazis during the war, then he disappeared for a few years. Came to Paris in ’49. We don’t know what his new connections are. We haven’t been bothering much about him.’

‘You’d better now. He suspects I’m not Chancellor and he’s demanding 14,000 ounces of gold, instead of the 9,000. I kicked that one, with his damned shoes. He has an exact model of Chancellor’s foot, with all the dimensions marked on it.’

‘Did you let him measure yours?’

‘No, but he thinks he knows. He got tough right away.

Well – anything else in that address book I should know about? Who's Montgomery Roach?

'A Syrian. Money changer, dope peddler, pimp. Small timer.'

'Where'd he get that name?'

'Stole it, probably, like everything else he's got. I'll send over a picture of him and of Willy in about two hours.'

We had reached the Institut end of the bridge and we turned there and started back. I looked at my watch. 8:01.

'I'm meeting Adolph Lauderbach at 8:15,' I said.

'Already? That's fast work,' said Franklin. 'You selling him on that transportation idea?'

'I'm going to try. What do you think?'

'Oh, he's up there. Director of a dozen big corporations, as you know. Lots of front. He's one of those who control Pindar, but whether he's the right one or not is for you to find out. That's your job, my boy.'

'Good enough. Now we come to the real trouble. Judy.'

'What about Judy?'

'Pindar is after her. Says she's got a police tie-up. You'd better ship her out of Paris fast.'

'We were intending to do that. She'll have to stay around another few days to make certain you are squared away – that there are no loose ends. Then off she goes.'

'I wouldn't wait,' I said.

'We can't take any chances on you,' he replied.

'And don't take any chances on her, either.'

It was 8:04. I shook hands with him at the Louvre end of the bridge, walked back to the left bank and got a cab on the *quai* to the Sicilione. Brandeli was jittering on the sidewalk beside his Citroën.

'Where the hell you been? We're late!' he greeted me.

'I'm here now, let's go,' I said. We got in the front seat and he pulled away from the curb with a flourish and headed for the river. We drove along the *quais*, crossed on the Pont de l'Alma, went up the Avenue Marceau, then

turned left on the Rue de Bassano and stopped in front of a gate in a high wall. Brandeli had made a real effort, for him, to be friendly, but I wasn't having any. I was still thinking about Judy.

'This is it,' he said. 'Ring the bell on the side of the gate there.'

I got out and pushed the button. A small door beside the gate clicked open. I walked in and faced two characters standing at the door of the *concierge's* lodge. They were big and well set-up and didn't look like mugs. There was no friendly welcome.

'You Chancellor?' one asked.

I nodded. 'Follow me,' he said. I did. We walked along the flagstones towards a huge mansion set in the back of a garden. A wide paved roadway led up from the gate beside the walk, curved in front of the steps leading to the front door, then continued to a four-car garage on the side. Huge glass chandeliers all alight were visible in the hallway behind the iron grille and glass front door and through the windows of a room to the left. This was one pretentious layout, and I wouldn't have been surprised to see hundred-dollar bills hanging from all the shrubbery. If this was how gangsters lived in Europe, then I certainly was in the wrong end of the business.

I was led up the steps and through the front door where I was relieved of my hat by a footman in livery. A butler in tails led me down a hall to a study done in Morocco leather and mahogany, and I found Lauderbach waiting for me in a deep leather chair with a martini on a stand at his elbow. It was the first time I had seen him without his hat. His head was as nude as a catfish. He looked at his watch.

'You're late, Mr Chancellor,' he said.

I looked at mine. So I was. It was 8:17. I apologized.

'Sit down,' he said. 'Martini? Pierre does them very well - dry.'

'Yes, thank you,' I said. The butler, who had been waiting by the door, nodded and left.

Then suddenly the doorway was filled by a most startling combination of colours and flashing lights. They encompassed a woman, a short, plump, round one with a bland moonface, but attired in the most sensationally theatrical costume one would encounter outside of a masked ball. Her evening dress of yellow velvet was cut low over a bulging front and there were diamonds glittering from every conceivable part of her, from the top of her ridiculous light-red curls to the heels and buckles of her golden slippers. She was a sort of an animated crystal chandelier, and she gave off enough light to read the *New York Times*. She hesitated in the doorway for a moment, then moved into the room, her sharp little eyes fixed on me.

I jumped up from my chair and Lauderbach unfolded himself from his. 'This is Mr Chancellor, Isabella,' he said. 'My sister, Mme Ballu.'

She held out a hand and I shook it, not realizing until later that I had been expected to kiss it. Then she sank into a small gold chair by a writing desk and fixed me again with her eyes. 'Chancellor,' she said, 'that's ten. Conrad - that is your first name, isn't it? - Conrad, that's six. Sixteen. Six and one is seven. Not bad. You are a seven, eh?'

I nodded at her, perhaps stupidly. Seven what?

Lauderbach had sat down again and I sank back into my chair. 'Chancellor was late,' he said to her in a complaining voice.

'Oh, tush, Adolph, he's a seven,' she replied. 'I've just told you that.' She turned to me. 'Young man, do you like the sea? Ships?'

I was startled right back to Wright Haghey. What was this, the showdown? The unmasking of Connie Chancellor? I gulped. 'Yes, ma'am,' I said.

'I knew it! Sevens always do!' She was immensely pleased. I relaxed again.

The butler brought in my martini, then backed to the door. 'Dinner is served,' he announced. Then he bowed to Lauderbach. 'The chef is upset, sir.'

'Whatever for?' demanded Isabella.

He looked at her doubtfully. 'If *madame* will pardon us,' he said, 'the chef asserts that we are off schedule.'

'Of course we are!' exclaimed Lauderbach testily, tossing a glare my way. He got up. I got up. Isabella rose with slow majesty, despite her shape, and led the way out of the room.

'I wouldn't put up with such a chef,' she tossed over her shoulder.

At the entrance to the dining room she put her arm in mine and we walked sedately to the head of the table, with Lauderbach bringing up the rear. The butler had reached there ahead of us through another passage and he was standing stiffly behind the chair, holding it for Isabella while she sat. A footman was behind the chair to her left and Lauderbach sat there. She motioned me to the seat at her right and the butler assisted me in the difficult task of sitting down.

The dinner was served immediately, starting with lobster *à la bisque*. The butler had brought my martini to the table but he scowled at me as I sipped it, before starting the soup. I took the hint.

'Where did you get those ideas of yours about helicopters?' Lauderbach asked me suddenly.

'In America,' I replied. 'They pick up and deliver the mail that way.'

'Have we got a helicopter, Adolph?' Mme Ballu asked.

'No, Isabella.'

'Why not, Adolph?'

'We have not had any use for it, dear.'

She nodded. She seemed to be satisfied.

'Do you know what you are talking about?' Lauderbach suddenly shot at me.

'Yes, sir. They make helicopters now to carry cargo. They can transport several tons for short distances. They can take off and land anywhere. They don't need airfields.'

'Anywhere?' asked Mme Ballu. 'In a garden? On top of a mountain?'

'Yes, ma'am,' I said. I was humouring her. She seemed to be a real screwball – a simple, sweet, harmless female, partly cracked, who liked to doll herself up in outrageous clothes and play the *grande dame*. That's the way I had her taped. But suddenly, as though some great upheaval had changed the character of all things about us, she became for a moment the dynamic and incisive leader, the one who gave the commands and who demanded obedience. And just as suddenly Adolph Lauderbach shrivelled up to the size of a lackey who took her orders and did her every bidding, hopeful for small crumbs of her approval.

'Why,' demanded Mme Ballu in a quarter-deck voice that set the chandelier to vibrating fearfully, 'have I not been told about this? Why have we not a helicopter?'

'Now, dear,' said Lauderbach, 'we—'

'Don't you "dear" me!' she exclaimed. 'I have had enough of your fumbling.' She turned to me, switching her scowl effortlessly to a smile. 'You will get me a helicopter?' she asked.

'They can be bought,' I said. 'They're expensive, but—'

'That is not what I asked,' she said patiently, but with a stop-fooling-around voice. 'I asked you to get one for me.'

'Then I can,' I said.

She nodded and lapsed into silence. We ate broiled sole and pheasant – out of season, of course – and asparagus and cheese and Baked Alaska. The wines were delicious and the service was perfect. I enjoyed it. I particularly enjoyed Mme Ballu. There was a dame to catch your fancy!

She asked me, with the cheese, what I knew about

aeroplanes, about transportation in general, and about smuggling contraband. She mentioned the Jaguar and the gold and complimented me on that.

I gave her the A-lecture I had memorized at DICA – the blueprint for setting up a system of illegal transportation that would circumvent all of the blocks and the prohibitions that DICA itself had clamped down upon underworld activities. It was no effort; it came out easily and with all of the right words, which were the words Chancellor would have used. When I reached the end and signed off with, 'That's about it, I guess,' Mme Ballu gave me a long, questioning look, then turned to her brother.

'I have never heard such ideas,' she said with a helpless sigh. 'What are we going to do?'

'We have Cassegrain handling these matters for us,' he said.

'That Cassegrain. A five!' she said scornfully. 'And all of our paper sits in New Jersey!'

'We are working on it.'

'But already it is too late!' She dismissed him with a wave of her hand and once more donned the raiment of authority. 'We will use this young man's plan,' she announced. She picked out the salient points with clarity and understanding.

'Machinery,' she said. 'It is being shipped by private transport plane all over the world every day. The big engineering companies that use this machinery have their own planes, and they fly directly to their operations – out of the way towns and airports. There is no examination by border guards. Only the invoices are checked. And these private planes are permitted to fly everywhere. *Voilà!* Could we use an oil company?'

'That would be ideal,' I said.

She turned to her brother. 'Have we yet disposed of Royal Franco-Iraq?' she asked.

'The deal is still pending,' he replied.

'Cancel it. Have Lewison and his people at my house tomorrow morning. They have planes, do they not? We will use their planes, then. We will buy the helicopter. That is the answer to our problem.'

'Yes, dear.'

'Have that man there, who handles their planes.'

She got up suddenly, her diamonds flashing out the signal of her determination. She turned to me. 'Take me home,' she said.

I escorted her out of the dining room and helped her into a sable jacket as the butler held the front door for us. At the bottom of the steps was a Rolls-Royce with a uniformed driver holding the door open. I handed her in, then got in beside her. We drove smoothly and quickly to the Avenue Foch.

'Your first name is Connie?' she asked me. 'I will call you that. You shall call me Mme Ballu.'

'Yes m'am,' I said.

'I have heard about you, but you are not at all what I expected. You are handsome enough but . . .' she let her voice trail away and I couldn't tell whether she was pleased or disappointed. 'Do you speak French, Connie?'

'Very little.'

'Never mind. I will give someone. . . . Do you prefer boys or girls?'

What did she mean by that? 'Girls,' I said.

'Well, one never knows. . . . Why does Pindar not trust you?'

'I don't know, Mme Ballu.'

'You know. You were going to double-cross him.'

It was a positive statement. She knew something about Connie Chancellor's double-dealing, then. But how much? 'I might have, but there was no opportunity,' I said.

'That is frank,' she said, 'but you *did* have the opportunity. Well, I will tell you this, Connie. Don't make any such mistakes with me. Not one!'

We arrived before a large private house on the Avenue Foch, almost big enough to be an apartment building. The front door was shining black lacquer and over it was a beautifully fashioned fan-light. I helped her out of the car and across the narrow sidewalk. 'Come here at ten tomorrow morning,' she said, giving me her hand. I kissed it this time. 'Take my car now. Sasha will drive you where you want to go.'

A small, pretty maid opened her door and I got back into the Rolls. Sasha turned an inquisitive eye back to me. 'Boulevard Raspail?' he asked.

I wondered how the devil he knew. I was miffed.

'Why the Boulevard Raspail, smart boy?' I asked.

'You got those photos coming from Franklin,' he said. He gave me a big wink and we were off.

The *concierge* gave me the envelope with the photos in it, and that got me to wondering whether she wasn't another one such as Sasha. It would have been very careless of DICA if she wasn't. 'You know who this is from?' I asked her in English, holding up the envelope.

'Sure,' she said. 'Why?'

Well O.K. I went up to the apartment and studied the pictures. They told me nothing. Roach had a big nose and a loose mouth, but he took a fair picture and his face looked like any of thousands you'd see around the Mediterranean. The picture of Willy Dorffman was fuzzy and apparently printed from a movie clip. He might have been anybody from a bus conductor to your brother-in-law.

Ten o'clock. Time was beginning to press in on me. No calls, no messages. I poured a large scotch and drank it straight with a little water afterwards. I walked around, I sat down, I walked around some more. Ten-thirty. The phone rang and I dived for it.

'Buy me a drink at the *Deux Magots*.' Judy's voice.

'Have I got time?'

I got down in the street fast and got a cab. Judy was sitting on the café *terrasse* at a small table. I sat down beside her.

'What's the pitch?'

She shook her head at me. 'Simmer down. We've got plenty of time.' She sounded annoyed, impatient.

I ordered some more scotch and took fifteen minutes drinking it. Ten-fifty.

'Let's go,' said Judy.

I paid the tab and we started walking, down the Boulevard St Germain.

'You want to talk now?' I asked her.

She was definitely upset about something. She walked stiffly and didn't say anything for a block. Then she scowled up at me. 'There's only one person it could be,' she said. 'That damned Diane!'

I stopped her. Did she know what she was saying? That was impossible!

'It couldn't be Diane!'

'It's got to be,' she replied. 'We checked on Willy's trips to Paris. He was here twice during the time Connie was seeing that bitch. We checked on every woman's name in that address book. Not one of them has an apartment. So, it's Diane.'

'But she won't speak to me!'

'How do you know? You have *seen* her!' It was an accusation.

'She came up to me on the Rue de Rivoli and called me a liar and a cheat, then took off. How am I going to get into her apartment tonight?'

She thought for a moment, then we started walking again. 'You meet her at that night club. She's got a dressing-room there and you get in. You be nice to her - take her a present. I know her kind. She'll fall all over you if you give her something.'

'Well, what? There are no stores open this time of the night.'

She slipped something into my hand. 'Give her that,' she said.

I looked at it. It was a bracelet of some sort. I moved to the lighted window of a stationery store and examined it. Judy stood off for a moment, then came to my side. The bracelet was of gold set with diamonds and was the kind that clipped onto the wrist. In the centre of it was a small gold plaque and when a button on the side was pressed, this opened to reveal a watch. I turned it over and looked at the back. LOVE FROM CONNIE was engraved there in script.

'You want me to give her this?' I asked.

'No,' she said, 'I don't *want* you to, but we haven't got much choice. . . . I don't wear the cheap kind of jewellery she'd appreciate.'

We looked at each other for a moment. I was surprised to see what might have been a tear on her cheek. I put the bracelet in my pocket and took her arm. I couldn't think of a thing to say to her.

'That watch keeps pretty good time,' she said as we started walking again.

I said good-bye to her at the cab stand nearby and took a taxi to the Théâtre Pleyel. This was a fair-sized room decorated in black velvet and crystal, with a small bar near the entrance, then the tables, and beyond that a small stage. The room was packed, the lights were low, and three dress-suited men were tossing about a small girl in a white lamé gown in a most astounding manner. A small orchestra to the left of the stage was playing softly and a *poule de luxe* at the bar said in my ear, 'Allo, monsieur, will you sit here by me?'

The head waiter gave me a questioning look. I nodded to him and he moved off. I took the seat beside the *poule* and ordered a *coupe* for her and a scotch for myself. Then I asked her, 'Has Diane Gilbert been on yet?' She thought

that over for a moment, sipping her champagne. 'Yes, but she will be back. She will give one more song, then *fini*.'

The adagio act finished and there was loud applause with a fanfare from the band. The lights on the stage went down and a small spotlight probed at the wings. Then there was Diane in the spot and the applause suddenly burst like the pounding of a surf. She moved centre and when the applause died, the orchestra could be heard vamping her introduction. She began to sing, a slow French torch song, and her clear vibrating voice filled every corner of your being. She was big time. She had the command and the control of the finished artist. What in the name of reason had the hoodlum Connie Chancellor to offer a woman like this?

'You like?' asked the *poule*, putting her arm in mine.

'She's great,' I said. I got up and moved to the door where the head waiter was standing.

'You speak English?' I asked him.

'But certainly, *monsieur*.'

I handed him a couple of thousand-franc notes. 'You will show me the way to Miss Gilbert's dressing-room?'

'*Non, monsieur*, that is forbidden,' he said.

'I am an old friend of hers,' I said. 'Chancellor. You have heard my name?'

I gave him two more thousand-franc notes. He looked at them doubtfully, then put them in his pocket. 'I have heard your name, but Mlle Gilbert says she does not want to see you.'

She had finished her number, and the thunder of the applause rolled over the room. I pulled the bracelet from my pocket. 'I must give her this present,' I said.

He looked at it and his eyes bulged. 'In that case, *monsieur*, I think it would be all right. Come.'

He led me down the side of the room along the aisle that the waiters used and through a door into a large serving-pantry. Five waiters were standing there smoking

and they looked me over. One smiled and nodded to me. We went through another door and we were backstage. There was a large open dressing room to one side and six girls there in various stages of costume change were sitting and moving about, oblivious to their lack of privacy. I turned my head away quickly and we moved along the back of the stage to a door on the other side. The head waiter knocked.

A voice that I now knew said, '*Attendez un moment!*' We stood there. Then the voice said, '*Entrez.*' We entered.

She was sitting at her dressing table, a towel around her hair and cream on her face. She wore a white dressing gown that was open in front, showing her beautiful legs and her pink panties. She was looking at us through her mirror. Then she whirled around in her chair and pointed a finger at me.

'Get out!' she ordered.

The head waiter beat a hasty retreat. I backed up against the door, closing it. I plunged my hand into my pocket and produced the bracelet. I took a step forward and offered it to her.

She was suddenly on her feet. Her eyes were blazing at me. She grabbed the watch out of my hand and threw it at me. It hit me on the chest and fell to my feet.

'Get out!' she said again. Her voice was low and threatening. She looked - wonderful.

I couldn't help myself grinning at her. I bent down and picked up the watch. I snapped open the little cover and looked at it to see if it was still running. It was.

'Look, darling, whatever I did, I'm sorry,' I said. 'I came to apologize. Won't you forgive me?'

'Never! You are a cheat! I do not want to see you again! Now go!'

I held the watch out to her again. 'Won't you take this anyway? It's for you. Then if you don't want to see me - all right.'

A puzzled look came into her eyes and some of her anger seemed to subside. I was making a very unreasonable offer to a French girl – something for nothing.

‘What do you mean?’ she asked.

I had her interested. She was forgetting to be angry.

‘I got this for you,’ I said, ‘and so I am giving it to you. Would you want me to give it to someone else?’

She took it in her hand and looked at it. She opened the top with the button, then let it snap shut. She turned it over in her hand and looked at the back. She formed the words of the engraving with her lips, then shook her head. She frowned at me.

‘There is not my name here,’ she said. ‘You *could* give it to someone else.’

‘But I don’t want to,’ I said, pressing my advantage. ‘You keep it.’

‘And you will not want to see me any more?’

‘Of course I want to see you, Diane. I like you very much.’

Her frown deepened. She looked at me intently out of those light blue eyes. She was sizing this Connie Chancellor up, and apparently she found something in him that was acceptable.

‘Wait,’ she said.

She turned to her dressing table and grabbed a towel. She wiped off her face quickly and rubbed her lips. She threw the towel down and came close to me. ‘Now,’ she said.

I put my arms around her and kissed her. It was – well, there are no words to tell of that kiss. It’s what I had been waiting for most of my life, I suppose, although I’m certain I didn’t realize it until that moment.

Then she was suddenly standing back from me and there was still that frown. What did she want, more than that?

‘You’ve never kissed me that way before!’ she said.

Then I was back in the wardroom of DICA, listening to another girl say these same words. 'You've never kissed me that way before.' Judy. Well, all right, so Connie Chancellor had never kissed her the way Wright Hughey did. So much the worse for Mr Chancellor. . . . But then she'd know I *wasn't* her Connie at all!

'No?' I said.

But then, with Judy, it hadn't made any difference to me. Then it was a test—a dry run. Now I had something riding on it. It *had* to work this time. I couldn't any longer afford that scepticism of last week—or was it last year?

'No,' she said. She had backed away from me and she was leaning against her dressing table.

'Well, those other times, it didn't mean anything,' I said.

'What other times?'

'When I kissed you.'

'Oh.' She nodded her head and sat down. She waved a hand at me. 'You wait outside, I'll get dressed.'

I went out, closing the door behind me. I stood beside it and looked over towards the big dressing room. All the girls but one had street clothes on. The one was parading arounding in panties and bra, modelling a large hat with feathers hanging from it. The other girls were laughing at her antics, which seemed at that distance to be carefully indecent. I thought of Pindar and his binoculars; how he would have enjoyed being there. The girl doing the modelling saw me and waved a hand at me. She demonstrated some more variations, then the party broke up and the girls started to leave. I lit a cigarette and watched a couple of aged stagehands stowing some furniture. The door behind me opened and Diane was standing there, looking up at me with a smile. She was wearing Judy's bracelet on her left wrist. She had on a small blue velvet hat and a simple silk dress of the same shade. There was a little fur jacket over her shoulders. I knew what it wasn't — mink

or sable. She put her arm in mine and led me out a back door into a narrow street. I looked at my watch as we passed under a street light. 12:25.

'Where are you taking me?' she asked.

'Can we go somewhere later? I'm supposed to meet someone at one o'clock.'

'One of your women?'

'No - I have no women except you.'

She wasn't buying that. She gave a short laugh. 'What do I do, then?'

'We could go to your apartment.'

'No,' she said. 'Not any more.'

'This man I was to meet was to come there,' I said.

She stopped and looked up at me. She was frowning again. 'Not that Willy!' she exclaimed.

'Yes,' I said, 'he's the one.'

'Never! I will not have that man in my house!'

I pleaded with her. 'Just this once,' I said, 'then I will never see him again. We will be rid of him.'

'No,' she said.

'He wrote me a letter,' I said. I produced it and handed it to her. 'It was nothing I did. I did not tell him to come there.'

She moved under a street light and read it. She gave it back to me. 'What is "payoff"?' she asked.

I shrugged. 'I won't know until I see him,' I said.

'You are funny. You are in trouble, I think. Well, we will go to my apartment.'

We walked to the Avenue George V and got a cab. I gave the driver the address - 83 Rue du Bac. Did everybody live on the Rue du Bac? That street kept popping into my life. We drove to one of the older apartment buildings of Paris. It looked shabby from the outside. I paid the driver and helped her out. I pressed the bell on the side of the large door and it clicked open. We entered a passageway into a courtyard and climbed the steps of

the first building on our right. I hung back a little, letting her lead the way. She stopped in front of a door on the second floor and took a key from her handbag. She handed it to me. It was an oddly shaped key and it didn't seem to fit the lock at all. I tried it this way and that, then finally it slipped in and the door opened. I found her looking at me searchingly, with that same frown. I gave her the key, closed the door, and took her fur jacket. There was a door that might have led to a closet. I opened it. It was a closet. I hung up her jacket on a hanger, and tossed my hat on a shelf. I turned around. She was still looking at me, frowning.

I put my arms around her and kissed her. She started to kiss me back, then suddenly drew away. She sighed deeply, shaking her head. She led me to the living room, a large, square room with two long windows on the street. She turned on the floor lamp and table lamps with a switch, then closed the curtains. I looked about, at the neat furniture, the scrubbed fireplace, the group of photographs on one wall. There was a comfortable divan and I sat. She curled up in a corner of it, with her feet under her, and faced me.

'Do you remember the Sunday on the little train in the Bois?' she asked me, laughing at the memory.

'Yes,' I said, returning her laugh. 'That was fun.'

'And you lost your hat and got off to get it, then chased the train!' she said. 'You can run fast!'

Then she had suddenly stopped laughing. She was looking at the watch I had given her, turning her wrist so that the light caught the diamonds and made them flash.

'Who are you?' she asked me, in a low voice.

I swallowed. I looked at her face, but it was expressionless. She kept her eyes down.

'Why do you ask that? You know who I am.'

'You are not Connie Chancellor. You look something like

him, but you are not. You talk like him, sometimes, and you walk like him, but you are somebody else.'

I laughed. It was meant to be an easy, humorous laugh. A what-a-silly-notion laugh. But I couldn't tell how it came out. 'That's a ridiculous idea you have, Diane. Of course I'm Connie Chancellor!'

She jumped up from the divan and stood before me, her hands on her hips and her legs spread belligerently. 'You are, are you! Well, let me tell you something!' She held up one hand and masked her points off with her fingers. 'Number one, Connie Chancellor has *never* kissed Diane Gilbert at all. Do you understand, not at all!' She folded down her thumb on that one. 'Number two, Connie Chancellor does not like Diane Gilbert - not one little bit! He spends a little money on her and he makes many big promises - none of which he keeps - but he does not like her! He is a liar and a *maquereau*! He tries to use Diane Gilbert for his dirty work - to make money out of her! With that nasty Roach man - with that nasty Willy!' Down came her first finger. She was suddenly calm again, an accountant listing Connie Chancellor's liabilities. 'Now the key. He knows how to use that key. It is a new lock and he has been here when it is put in, and he shows me how to use it. But you don't know!' She folded her second finger and gave me a contemptuous look. 'Then the Bois! I have never been to the Bois with Connie Chancellor! We have never ridden on the little train! He has never lost his hat! I have never seen him run! Do you understand all that, monsieur Whoever-you-are?'

'Yes,' I said. 'It is all very clear. Why did you kiss me, then?'

She glared at me, ignoring my question. 'You will tell me what you want and then you will get out of here. I will have nothing to do with your kind! *Maquereau*!' She took off the watch and tossed it into my lap. 'Take that, too.'

So it had come - a second time. First Gratz and his foot

model, although his was a suspicion rather than a certainty. Now Diane, but there was more than suspicion here. She was sure. She knew her Chancellor, and she was a smart cookie. But – what difference did it make? I was still alive and I couldn't find any menace in her, try as I might. I saw nothing in her, in fact, except a woman that I wanted.

'You want to listen to a story?' I asked her.

'What do you mean, story? More lies?'

'Now look, you yourself say I'm not Connie Chancellor. Well, if I'm not, then maybe I'm not a liar either.'

She nodded at me. 'That's reasonable,' she said. She got back on the divan and put her legs under her again. 'Commence.'

'Suppose there were two people who looked exactly alike. But outside of their appearance, they were not alike at all. One of them, who is me, is a very average, normal guy who doesn't want to harm anyone and would like to earn his living honestly. But because of the peculiar circumstances of resembling this other person, this becomes impossible. This man who is me has got to do all sorts of things that he detests, and the reason he has to do them is to stay alive. That's what it all boils down to – either I act the way I act or I am dead.'

'You want me to believe that!' she demanded.

'Well, you can see for yourself. Am I or am I not Connie Chancellor?'

She looked at me closely and a puzzled frown came to her face. 'Yes, I see that part of it. You are this Chancellor in many ways. Even I thought you were at first.'

'Well, that's it. I am Chancellor and I've got to remain Chancellor. That's what you've got to understand. But I'm not a liar and I'm not a cheat and I'm not a *maquereau*.'

A pussy-cat smile came on her face. She didn't look up at me. 'Well, I kissed you, didn't I?' she said, which may or may not have been a properly responsive statement.

'Yes, you did – but what does that mean? You kiss me

one minute and the next you call me a lot of names and act as though I'd just broken your dolly. You think you can buy my trust and my confidence with a kiss? You think—' .

'What!' she interrupted, pointing a finger at my nose. 'You can't trust *me*! You listen to me you – you *coquin*! I'll tell you something—'

The doorbell rang, interrupting that tirade. Diane jumped off the divan and stood uncertainly. I looked at my watch. 1:04.

'That's Willy,' I said.

She came over to me and reached down. She took the watch-bracelet from my lap where I'd left it. She put it on her wrist and looked at it. Then she leaned down again and brushed my lips with hers. The doorbell rang a second time.

'I'm coming,' she said. 'Keep your shirt on.'

VII

Diane hurried out of the room. I heard the door open. I heard a man's voice speaking French. It was a guttural voice, unpleasant. I couldn't make out his words.

Then there was a cry from Diane and a loud slap. She came hurrying into the room, her face scarlet. Willy Dorffman followed behind her. He was angry. He came to the centre of the room, glaring at Diane, then at me. He was a big man – about my size – and his clenched fists were huge hams. He had a mean, sagging mouth and little pig eyes that darted about. His hair was cut short in the German manner.

'What in hell is this!' he said to me. 'You told me you'd have it all fixed up with her!' He spoke with a strong German accent, but his English was facile enough.

'I've changed my mind,' I said. 'Diane's mine. Lay off her.'

He took two stiff steps towards me. 'What!' he roared, 'you talk to me like that!'

He stood fuming at me. Then he moved towards her. She was standing by the fireplace and she shrank away from him. For a big man, he moved very fast. However, so did I. I intercepted him and gave him a shoulder which threw him off balance and hard up against the mantel. Diane had escaped to a corner of the room. I caught a fast flash at her face. She was smiling at me.

'Damn you!' he growled. He made a grab for me. I stepped back and he grabbed air. I watched him warily. He was getting ready to spring, like a big cat. 'Don't fight with me, Willy,' I told him. 'We can always find you another woman.'

He sneered at me, but he straightened up and relaxed slightly. 'You think you are getting away with something, Chancellor?'

'We'll take that up later,' I said. 'Sit down and relax.'

He was frankly puzzled. I wasn't acting a bit like Chancellor, and I knew it. Diane had thrown me off my stride and I was messing up the entire scene. I looked over at her. She had moved out of her corner and was standing with her hands on the back of a chair, taking it in. Willy continued to glare at me, then came over to the divan and sat down where Diane had been curled up.

'You want a drink?' I asked him.

'Schnapps,' he said. He barked the order as to a waiter.

I raised my eyebrows to Diane. She nodded and moved to the door. 'You just get in?' I asked him pleasantly.

'What's come over you?' he demanded. It was the same old question that everybody asked. Something had happened to the Connie Chancellor they all knew.

'I've turned over a new leaf,' I said. 'I'm a different man. I like it better this way.'

'I don't,' he said.

Diane came in with a schnapps for him and a whisky and water for me. She started to sit down.

'Bring in my bag,' Willy ordered her.

She hesitated, looking at me. I gave her a nod and she went out, returning immediately with a large leather case. It was heavy and she carried it with difficulty. She dropped it in the middle of the floor, then stalked from the room. Willy laughed at her. I looked at his mean face and thought my own thoughts.

'Well, there it is,' he said, motioning with his glass, then swallowing the contents. 'You'll get the rest of it within a week.'

'I'd better see it,' I said.

'See it? What for? There's enough concentrate there to mix up 500 pounds.' He reached in his pocket and handed me a folded paper. 'There's the analysis. That's all you need.'

I took the paper and put it in my pocket.

'Well,' he demanded.

'Well what?'

'The money!' he roared. 'Damn it, where's the money?'

'I'll have to get it for you.'

'Get it for me!' He sat back and looked at me as though he were seeing me for the first time. 'You are fooling with me, maybe?'

'No.'

'I want the one hundred and eighty million francs *now*!' he said, spacing his words slowly. 'One hundred and eighty million, do you understand? The money you are getting from Gratz.'

'I haven't got it yet,' I said. 'That deal didn't come off the way we had planned.'

'Ah? So it didn't come off the way you had planned, *hein*? Well, now, Mr Chancellor, that's just too bad! Yes, too bad! Who got the gold, do you mind telling me?'

'Pindar.'

'That *schwein!*' He jumped up from the divan. He was in a maniacal rage. 'You have wrecked me!' he screamed. 'You are an idiot! An idiot!' He stamped around the room aimlessly for a moment, fumbling in his pants pocket. Suddenly he came at me with a long, ugly knife in his hand. It had a blue steel blade that held my eyes fascinated for a split second. But no longer, for I had begun to move, too. I was off the divan like a shot and I had a small, round table in my hands. I backed away from him until I felt the mantel at my neck, holding the table to one side. He advanced, holding the knife low, bent over for a sudden lunge.

'You won't get away,' he growled.

I waited until he was so close, then I swung the table. He dodged it easily, as I had expected. But during that split second of dodging, he was off balance, and that's when I sprang on him. He hadn't been expecting that. But he was remarkably strong, for one so flabby, and I felt the blade of the knife grind into a rib-bone despite my grip on his arm. I gave him a short, hard chop to the jaw with my fist, then another to the neck with the side of my hand. I felt him sag. I let him go and grabbed the knife, removing it carefully from my torso. I looked up and Diane was standing in the doorway, the back of her hand up to her mouth.

I moved away from Willy, holding the knife. 'You got any rope?' I asked her.

She shook her head. Then she let her hand drop and she came quickly to my side. 'You are hurt,' she said. 'You are leaking.' She pointed to my shirt where it was turning red. She took my hand. 'Come to the bathroom.'

'We take care of him first,' I said, pointing to Willy. 'He's dangerous.'

'What do we do?' she asked.

'Tie him up.'

She thought a moment. 'You could use towels?'
'Good enough.'

She ran from the room. Willy had begun to stir. I bent down and gave him another crack on the neck with the side of my hand. He subsided. Diane came back with a stack of towels. I took one and bound his hands behind him with it. I tied a couple of them around his legs. I opened his mouth and stuffed an end of one into it, then bound another around his head so it would hold.

'Maybe he can't breathe,' Diane said.

'Maybe. No loss. Where's your phone?'

She shook her head at me. 'We fix up your side first,' she said.

'No, phone.'

She pointed her finger at me. 'You do as I say! You can't bully me! I'm not a Willy!'

I grabbed her finger and kissed it. Then I kissed her, but she broke it off. 'Come,' she said. She took me by the hand into the bathroom, took off my coat, lifted up my shirt, and washed the knife-hole with a towel. Then she soaked some cotton in a disinfectant, put it over the wound, and bound a bath towel around it. She was efficient, no fooling around.

'Now we phone,' she said.

She led me by the hand into her bedroom and sat me on the bed. She took the phone from a cupboard in the bedside table and handed it to me. I dialled an Invalides number. A woman answered. 'I'm calling from Odeon 77-35,' I said. I waited a long minute.

'Odeon 77-35 clear,' she said.

'Geneva.'

'Yes, Geneva.'

'Two men, a van, and a box for a body. The address is 83 Rue du Bac. First building on right inside court. Second floor, left door. Name's Gilbert. Right now.'

'*D'accord*. That all?'

'Notify Belgrade.'

'But of a certainty.'

I hung up. Diane was sitting beside me on the bed. 'What's all that about?' she asked.

'We'll get rid of our visitor.'

She nodded. That was reasonable. 'Where?'

'Oh, they'll take him away.'

'Who?'

'Friends. . . . Don't ask questions.'

'I told you about bullying me,' she said. 'You want a punch in the nose?'

We went back into the living room. Willy was moving around. I hoped he was uncomfortable. I examined the towels. They were holding very well. Presently there was a ring at the bell and Diane and I hurried out to open the door. Two large types dressed as moving men were at the door, a long box between them. I held the door open while they came in with the box and I pointed to the living room. Then General Delong came up the stairs, dressed in evening clothes with a black cape over his shoulders. I felt foolishly pleased to be able to introduce such a distinguished looking visitor to Diane.

'Diane Gilbert, may I present the Marquis de Rouchmont,' I said.

He kissed her hand. I took his cloak and put it over a chair. We all moved aside as the moving men came out with their box. They handled it easily, despite its weight. 'There's a bag, too,' I said. 'Come back for that.'

They looked at me uncomprehendingly. Delong translated for them. They lowered the box and one returned for the bag, putting it on top. They left and I closed the door. We three went into the living room.

'I have heard of Mlle Gilbert,' the general said.

'Thank you,' she replied.

He looked at me, then back at her. There seemed to be something that he disliked.

'That was Willy Dorffman in the box,' I said. 'I would suppose the bag contains narcotics.' I handed him Willy's paper from my pocket. 'He wanted one hundred and eighty million francs for it – all the money I was supposed to have collected from Gratz. He knew about the Gratz deal.'

'Aren't you talking too much?' he asked testily.

'No, sir. Diane was here and heard all about the deal – or most of it. She knows what's going on.'

He looked at her speculatively for a moment, then looked back at me. 'She knows too much, I think,' he said. 'I'll take her with me.'

Diane looked at me with a trace of fear in her eyes. 'What does he mean?' she asked.

I took her hand and held it. 'That won't be necessary,' I told him.

'Don't be an idiot, Chancellor,' he said. 'She's in this up to her long eyelashes. . . . How much have you told her?'

'I've told her nothing, but she does know an awful lot,' I admitted. What did he mean, Diane was 'in it'? Did he think she was a member of this gang-world playing me for a sucker? I looked at her and saw real fear in her eyes now. 'Isn't this a sudden development, general?'

'We've been digging since shortly after eight o'clock,' he said. 'Strange things come to light.' He turned to Diane. 'Do you know Mme Ballu and Adolph Lauderbach?' he asked her.

She looked from him to me. Then she moved from my side and sank down on the divan. She put her head in her hands as though she were very tired. 'Yes, I know them,' she mumbled.

'Do you know them well, Diane?'

I found myself resenting his use of her first name in that familiar, policeman manner.

'Yes, very well, *monsieur*. She is my aunt and he is my uncle.'

'She is your mother's sister?'

'Yes.'

'She paid for your schooling – for your training so that you could go on the stage?'

'Yes.'

'She is the widow of Nikki Ballu, the gambler?'

'Yes.'

'She pays for this apartment?'

'Well, she owns the building and so I pay no rent.'

'Have you ever discussed Mr Chancellor with her?'

'Yes.'

'What did she tell you?'

She raised her head and looked at me. Her eyes were expressionless. 'She told me to keep away from him. That he was a *miserable* – a gangster.'

I smiled at Delong. 'Good advice,' I said.

He gave me a sour look. 'All right,' he said to her, 'what do you know about Adolph Lauderbach? What do you do for him that his sister pays for your schooling and for your apartment?'

'Do for him?' She looked at him indignantly. 'Why, I do nothing for him! These are my family and so I feel free to accept gifts from them. When they want me to do something for them, then they will tell me.'

'Exactly.' He looked at me. 'What do you say now?'

'This is a different box of bonbons,' I admitted. 'What do you suggest?'

'That she comes with me.'

I looked at her sitting on the divan, worried apprehensive. It didn't seem possible that this girl, of all girls, could do me any harm. But the facts were the facts – as fantastic as they were. Lauderbach's niece! What a hell of a tangle!

'There's another point,' I said. 'If she were to vanish now, it would raise a stink all over Paris. She's too well known.'

'That will be arranged,' he said impatiently.

'Sure. And I suppose you're going to arrange it so that no one will know I was the last person she was seen with.'

That stopped him. 'Is that true?'

'Yes. A dozen people can testify to it. . . . Leave her here. Let me talk to her.'

He nodded at me and started towards the door. 'You've put your foot in it; let's see you get it out,' he said.

I closed the outer door after him and returned to the living room. Diane was sitting on the divan where we'd left her, still looking worried. She frowned at me.

'The police?' she asked.

'No,' I replied, 'not in the ordinary sense. He doesn't go around arresting people.'

'And you?'

'Me either. . . . Look, Diane, do you think you could trust me?'

'Maybe. I am very confused about you just now. I was beginning to like you – now I don't know.'

'Will you do something for me?'

She gave me a long, hard look. Then suddenly she smiled. 'Yes,' she said.

'Will you tell no one about what happened here tonight – about Willy and the Marquis? About me?'

'Maybe. What's in it for me?'

Well here it was. I'd heard a lot about these French girls. Nothing for nothing. 'What did you have in mind?'

She didn't like my tone of voice. She jumped up from the divan and faced me. 'Don't talk to me like that!' she exclaimed. 'I'll tell you what I had in mind. A million dollars! Jewels, furs, a big house! Or . . . You could just be nice to me.'

Mme Ballu's house on the Avenue Foch was something you'd have to see to believe. And after you'd seen it, the chances of believing were not much better. The entrance

hall on the street level gave a small hint that one might encounter the unusual. It was all mirrors – walls, ceiling, and even the floor, but not just ordinary looking-glasses. They were of different hues, with pink predominating, and so you saw yourself hundreds of times in technicolour wherever you looked. There was a large nook with a dressing-table in it and a dozen quart jugs of various perfumes so that *madame* and her visitors could freshen up their faces and their odours upon arrival and departure. Opposite the nook was a closet door, and I mention this only because when the small, friendly maid opened it to stow my hat, there were revealed a row of furs that looked like the annual Siberian auction. Well, then up a staircase all done in more mirrors and into – a bathroom! So help me, that's what it was! A huge sunken tub was in the centre of the room, long enough for about four good crawl strokes, all of it beautifully tiled in pink. The edge of the tub and the surrounding floor were covered with fine mosaic work featuring nude ladies. There were fur bathmats spread around which hid most of these ladies, but you got the idea. And those bathmats – mink! Nothing less! With mink robes over the *chaises longues*. The walls and the huge domed ceiling, which supported a tremendous chandelier, were more mosaics of nude ladies, chasing fauns and picking flowers and playing with snakes and things. Their predominant colour was pink and every dame was at least twenty pounds overweight.

I closed my mouth and looked back down to the tub. I'd been right the first time. There was *madame*, wallowing like a red-headed rhinoceros in her pool. . . . But don't get the idea she wasn't also dressed for company. She was wrapped up in a good half yard of Bikini – pink, naturally. What a sight!

'Sit down, Connie,' she said, waving a wet arm at a *chaise longue*. Then she had the decency to giggle. 'I imagine you're surprised!'

'A little,' I admitted. I sat. The room was uncomfortably damp, which matched all of my feelings. 'You have a most unusual house, Mme Ballu.'

'Thank you,' she replied, as though I had paid her a high compliment. 'I suppose it is a bit out of the ordinary. . . . The only time I feel good is when I'm in the water. And I have a mean old doctor who restricts me to just a few hours a day.' She moved to a small platform beside her tub and pressed one of a row of buttons. 'Now we shall get to work.'

The button brought action. A couple of Amazons in maid's uniforms moved in a desk, on rollers, and chairs. A telephone was plugged into the wall. People began arriving and I was given a cute, dark-haired secretary who spoke and wrote French, Italian, and English with equal fluency. 'The girl I promised you,' said Mme Ballu when she introduced her. Mlle Constantine. I was given a fast run-down on the Royal Franco-Iraq Oil Company, their planes available, lists of personnel, shipping lines we could deal with and the names of scores of contacts. . . . It was a most stupendous collection of information to throw at one person in the short space of an hour and a half, and the only thing I got out of it was utter confusion. Through it all, Mme Ballu soaked in her tub, listening with her bright eyes shining, occasionally correcting a statement, now and then asking a sharp, pertinent question. Then as suddenly as it all had begun, the bathroom was cleared of people, desk, telephone, and I was back on the *chaise longue*. It was difficult to believe it had ever happened. Mme Ballu rose from her tub and draped one of the mink robes around her fat shoulders. She came and sat on another *chaise longue*.

'Confusing?' she asked, reading my mind.

'Yes,' I admitted. 'I can't do business this way.'

'I know. This was just to get your feet wet, but mainly to let those oil people see you in my bathroom. Now they

will take orders from you. We have to make one step at a time.'

'Yes m'am.'

'There is a big shipment of materials in America that should have been here weeks ago. We must have it immediately, but we have been able to do nothing. Everything has been closed to us – all the borders, the ships. Our contacts have disappeared, or else they refuse to do business with us. It is unbelievable! Such a mess! Cassegrain putters. My brother putters. Pindar worries about his gold – and gold will buy 'nothing any more. I can't buy anything with it. Not one little ten-franc customs man who will put his chalk mark on a package of paper without looking at it! Paper, mind you! And Pluto is in trine with Virgo! It is unbelievable! What day were you born?'

I'd lost her suddenly. 'April second,' I replied.

'April second! You won't do at all! Aries! No! – am I wrong? Get me my book.' She pointed to a thick volume lying on a table on the other side of the tub. I walked around and got it for her. Astrology. 'The Secret of the Stars.' She wiped her hands on a towel before taking it. She turned quickly to a section, then leafed through several pages. She read one, mumbling the words to herself, then looked up at me sharply. 'What hour?' she demanded.

'Hour?'

'Yes, yes. What hour were you born?'

Hell, I didn't know. But a lot seemed to be riding on it at that moment. I picked a number – 83 Rue du Bac. That was going to have to be lucky for me. 'Eight-thirty in the evening,' I said.

She read some more. Her face relaxed slightly and she closed the book, handing it to me. 'Well,' she said, all business again, 'what do you think? Could you fly this shipment over to us in our oil planes, and land it safely?'

What had the book told her? Was eight-thirty the right number? 'What is the weight?' I asked.

'About twenty tons, I think.'

I dug back in my mind to that absurd 'conference'. A little man named Perrel in striped trousers and morning coat, smelling strongly of *eau de cologne*, had told me about two cargo planes. Armstrong-Vickers machines with turbo-prop engines. He had shown me a large photograph. Could they fly the Atlantic? And if they could, how much cargo could they carry? 'I will find out,' I said.

She was disappointed. Her face fell. 'I tell you we haven't time! We are in a most dangerous situation!'

'O.K., Mme Ballu, you want the cargo here in a hurry. I will have it here. I promise you that.'

'You talk very big!' She was not convinced. 'We cannot take any chances with it!'

'I'll get it delivered for you. Let me do it my way. . . . You've tried your own way and it hasn't worked. Give me a chance to back up all that I told you and your brother. You think I could afford to lose that shipment for you?'

She squirmed around inside her robe. She was making up her mind. 'Do it then,' she told me.

I let out my breath and was surprised to discover how tense I'd been. 'Where is this – this material?'

'New Jersey.'

'And what is it?'

She gave me a long, hard look. 'I have told you. Paper.'

'I have to know about its bulk – about the weight of the boxes or packages, so I will know how much cargo space I will need and how to stow it. These things have to be figured out exactly – it's just like loading a ship, where every square foot of room counts.'

She nodded. 'There are also some – chemicals,' she said. 'There are eight steel drums of this – like those big oil drums you see. The rest is the paper, in big packages.' She

spread her arms to indicate their size. 'It is very valuable paper, and it must not be made wet, or even damp.'

'I can get the exact weights?'

'I will give them to you.' She got up and started out, saying she was going to get dressed. Then suddenly she turned back to me, her eyes flashing angrily.

'I want to tell you one more thing,' she said. 'Keep away from Diane Gilbert. That is an order, Mr Chancellor.'

VIII

It was ten minutes after twelve when I got away from Mme Ballu's, after explaining that I could not have luncheon with her if I was to organize the cargo lift and get her the helicopter, which she wanted right away. She expressed great disappointment; she even attempted to inveigle me with hints about the joys to be encountered after luncheon with Mlle Constantine. She was an odd and conflicting person – a hard, efficient business woman one minute and an empty-headed floozie the next. It was no easy thing to keep my balance. So she told me to use her Rolls-Royce and Sasha; that she had a Bentley she would drive herself when she went out.

Sasha had been called from some mysterious source and he was waiting beside the car when I reached the street.

'Take me to a safe telephone,' I told him. 'Fast.'

He swung off the avenue and into a side street, stopping at a *tabac*. 'Check it first,' he said as I got out.

I went in and dialled the Archive number. The man's voice answered.

'Klèber 65-24,' I told him.

After a moment, 'Klèber 65-24 clear.'

'Geneva. Set up a one-twenty immediately. All Belgrade, if possible. I'll wait.'

'Ne quittez-pas.'

I waited. A couple of types at the zinc counter were drinking a before-luncheon Calvados and eyed me suspiciously. An old dame with a black shawl around her shoulders was sitting at a table very near me, writing carefully in the margins of a letter that already filled two pages. The *patron* was at my end of the zinc with his ear cocked to hear my conversation.

'You there?' the voice asked suddenly.

'Yes.'

'Fifteen minutes. Tour Eiffel elevator.'

'Roger.'

I hung up. The *patron* gave a disappointed snort and turned back to his customers. I went out and told Sasha to get me to the Tour Eiffel in fifteen minutes. He started driving, not too fast, talking to me over his shoulder.

'How you like her?' he asked.

'A doll.'

'Pardon? Oh, yes! Oh, yes!'

'Look, when you drop me, go to 83 Rue du Bac. First building to your right inside the passage. Second floor. Mlle Gilbert. You understand that?'

'Yes, but you should not!'

'Never mind that. Get her. Tell her it's important, that you come from me. Take her to the Avenue de New York, just on the other side of the Pont d'Iena. Park there. I'll be along. You got that?'

'Yes, but don't do it!'

'Stow it. That's an order. You want me to tell Mme Ballu that you disobeyed me?'

He gave me an elaborate shrug and refused to talk to me any more. He pulled up on the Quai Branly in front of the tower and I got out.

'You go to the Rue du Bac now,' I told him.

He gave me a pitying look, then drove away. I walked quickly to the tower elevator. There was a crowd there.

closely packed. A uniformed guard flanked by two gendarmes was explaining to a woman with a small girl hanging to each arm that the *ascenseur* was temporarily out of commission, but would be working again in five minutes. There was some mild muttering from the crowd, listening to this explanation. I pushed my way through. The guard pointed a finger at me for the benefit of his listeners and said, '*Alors! l'ingenieur!*' The gendarmes made way for me to enter the lift. The guard followed me in and closed the door. Burleigh, Delong, and van der Heide were standing there waiting for me, looking like prosperous tourists. We started up.

'There's twenty tons of cargo we've got to pick up in New Jersey and fly here,' I said. 'It should be made in one plane-load, to simplify it. We've got no time at all. It's got to be done immediately. Now then, can an Armstrong-Vickers 212 do it?'

'No,' said Burleigh. 'Not in one load. Couldn't carry enough gas with twenty tons of cargo.'

'What do I need?'

'A Boving,' said Delong, 'or a Lancaster or Douglas or Consolidated, but I'd suggest a Boeing.'

'Yeah? Why?'

'We can get you one.'

'Good enough. How about the crew?'

'We've got the crew. Italians, and good.'

'Where's the plane now?'

'It's in England,' he said. 'Now then, what's your cover for the plane? How are you going to use it? We can't let you go flying around without a good excuse.'

'That's all arranged,' I said. 'It'll be a transport of the Royal Franco-Iraq Oil Company. All you have to do is to arrange the story for me of where and how I got the plane. The oil company will do the rest.'

'We can do that, but where does Royal Franco-Iraq fit into the picture? That's a big, legitimate operation.'

'We own it,' I replied. 'Mme Ballu and me.'

Burleigh shook his head in wonderment. DeLong raised his eyebrows at van der Heide. The Dutchman said, 'That's one we didn't know about!'

'And Mme Ballu,' asked Burleigh, 'what's she got to do with it? We've planted Sasha with her just for protection, because of Lauderbach, but she's no underworld character.'

'She's Lauderbach's boss,' I said. 'She not only runs him, but she runs Pindar and Royal Franco-Iraq and a whole hell of a lot of other things I'm going to find out about. . . . Don't underestimate Isabella.'

'I can't believe it!' exclaimed van der Heide. 'Are you sure you know what you're talking about, young man?'

'Get off it,' I told him. 'Don't try to patronize me!'

Burleigh rushed into the breach. 'Now, Chancellor,' he said, 'keep it friendly. . . . Give us two or three days and we'll have the Boeing for you. We'll have it serviced, and of course you'll want Royal Franco-Iraq markings painted on.'

'All right,' I said. 'I'll want to use Orly airport so get it out there. Late Sunday or Monday.'

'We'll arrange it,' he said. 'Have Royal Franco apply for the permits in the usual way and we'll see that they go through.'

'What's the plane going to cost me, for the record?'

'It'll have to be no less than \$500,000, and in dollars. These planes are impossible to buy, so if the price were low it would look bad.'

We were about half way up the tower and noon-time Paris spread below us. It was a wonderful and fascinating sight and I looked around out of the grilled elevator, watching the steel beams of the tower slide down past us and the picture of the city unfolding beyond them.

'What's the cargo?' asked Burleigh.

'Chemicals in steel barrels. Eight of them. But mostly

paper. Very expensive paper, I would gather. It must be handled with great care.'

Burleigh, Delong, and van der Heide exchanged significant glances. 'If you take off Monday, you'll be back by Friday!' exclaimed Delong. 'My God, that doesn't give us much time!'

'What would be in the barrels?' I asked.

'Ink would be inevitable,' said van der Heide. 'We already let them know that the peculiar circumstance of the ink on those first bills has been noticed. It was a sure way to delay them - to make them stop production.'

Now we were nearing the top of the tower. The guard running the elevator slowed it down and asked in French if we were ready for the descent. 'Take it down, Gaston,' Burleigh replied. 'Then he said to me, 'We'll arrange a meeting this afternoon and give you all the information on the plane - where it comes from and whom you dealt with. You'll have a good story to tell them.'

'Make it tonight,' I said. 'I'm busy this afternoon.'

'Yes?' said Delong with a nasty inflection.

'Yes,' I said. 'Diane Gilbert. We're going out in the country.'

His lips formed into a straight, hard line. He looked a question at Burleigh. The latter shrugged slightly.

We continued our descent in silence for a moment.

'Well, about the helicopter,' Burleigh said. 'What's the verdict on that?'

'They want it immediately,' I replied. 'They want it around Marseilles, to meet the cargo plane. I don't know where it fits in yet. It was a good guess. I think it sold them on the whole plan. It seemed to be the one thing that they hadn't thought of.'

'Fine. You remember all the load weights on that?'

'Yes. I'll tell them when the time comes.'

'Any hints on whom you're dealing with?'

'No. There are two or three up there, but so far nothing.

Just Mme Ballu. She's got a lot of power. She's close to the top.'

The elevator approached the bottom. The crowd outside had grown considerably, and there was a collective sigh as we came in for our landing.

'I'm going to have one more talk with Diane,' I said quickly. 'If she won't listen to reason, where shall I take her?'

'Hotel d'Alfortville,' said Delong. 'Nineteen Rue de Madrid. Can you remember that?'

'Does Sasha know it?'

'Yes.'

Gaston opened the elevator gate and we three pushed our way through the crowd.

'Don't trust her,' Burleigh warned me as we parted.

I walked quickly across the Pont d'Iena and found the Rolls parked nearby on the Avenue de New York. Diane was in the back seat. She wore no hat and her hair glittered in the sunlight that streamed through the window. I opened the door and got in. She was not in a friendly mood.

'What are you doing with my aunt's car and driver?' she demanded.

'Taking you out to the country for lunch,' I said. I put my hand on hers but she drew it away.

'I have an engagement. I am late now.'

'It's broken,' I said. 'This is important. This is business.'

'Your kind of business! Well, I will have nothing to do with it!' She leaned forward and spoke to Sasha. 'Take me to the Tour d'Argent,' she said. 'And hurry.'

Sasha started the engine and drew into the traffic. What had happened to the Hughey personality? Where was all that famous charm? 'You're not the same Diane I left last night,' I said.

'I've been doing a lot of thinking since last night,' she replied.

I put my arm around her shoulder. She sat there stiff, unyielding. 'I haven't changed my mind about you,' I said. 'I don't think I ever will. . . . Have you decided you don't *want* me to be nice to you?'

She yielded then, a slight bit. 'No.'

'You told me right after we met that you thought I was in trouble. Well I am. I'm in trouble over you — because I like you too much.'

She relaxed against my shoulder — just a little. 'I like you, too, but it's all so — so confusing! I am afraid of you and your friend!'

'Well, I don't like it any better than you do. . . . If we could go somewhere and talk, then maybe I could make you understand.'

'But I have this appointment! There is an agent waiting for me—'

'An agent! Let him wait. Do him good.'

'Do you think so?' She smiled up at me.

I bent down and kissed her. I couldn't resist it. She pushed me away and she was angry again.

'Why did you do that?'

Questions. And no answers. I leaned forward and asked Sasha, 'Do you know the way to Robinson's Gardens?'

'No!' she said, putting her hand on my arm. 'Please—!'

Sasha nodded. 'Yes, *monsieur*,' he said.

'All right, go there. And fast.'

She moved away from me into her corner and looked at the floor. She wasn't having anything more to do with me. But of course, she could have set up an outcry; she could have demanded that Sasha stop and she could have gotten out. She could have done a number of things, but she didn't. She just pouted.

Sasha drove to the outer boulevards, made a right turn at the Porte de Chatillon, and drove out a series of avenues through Chatillon to a road angling off to the left with a big sign at the corner, '*Le Plessis Robinson*.' We went a

short way down that road, then turned through a huge gate into the *plessis*. Sasha jumped from his seat and edged a *chasseur* out of the way to open the door for us. A head waiter came hurrying up. Before us were the rows of huge oaks, each one with a small stairway leading up to a platform among its branches whereon were the tables and chairs for the diners in this most curious restaurant in the world. Well, it was appropriate, for Diane and me to be up a tree on that afternoon.

I let Diane walk ahead with the *maitre d'hotel* and told Sasha, 'Phone the Elysée number and leave word I must see Miss Deprez tonight.' If I couldn't convince Diane, then maybe Judy would be able to. It was worth trying.

I caught up with Diane and took her arm. It was late enough so that many of the tables-in-the-trees were empty, and we were led directly to the foot of a huge oak that must have been growing there when the Germans marched down the Champs Elysées in 1870. We climbed the narrow stair after the head waiter and sat in comfortable chairs across a small table. There was a curtain of branches and leaves around us; we were as private as a bedroom.

'I have always wanted to come here,' Diane said. 'How do you know about it?'

She was friendly again.

'I took a lot of lessons on Paris,' I said. I ordered a luncheon of hors d'œuvre, grilled trout, cheese, and tarts, accompanied by Montrachet and Pol Roger.

'You like this better than with that agent?' I asked her.

She nodded. 'Yes. And besides, I think that one day I may be able to make something out of you.'

'Like what?'

'Oh – we'll see. Plenty of time for that.'

'There's not much time for anything, Diane. . . . I'm in no position to offer you anything now.'

'You're married!' she said. She held her breath.

'No.'

She let it out. 'Well, then it's settled.'

Our luncheon began arriving, hoisted up from the ground on ropes. The waiter left us with our coffee and Diane smiled across at me.

'You still haven't told me how it is that you have my aunt's car and driver.'

'I work for her,' I said.

'You do? Then it's all very simple. I will talk to her about you and she will help you. I know that you are in some sort of trouble, but she is very rich and she has many powerful friends who will give you assistance.'

'Do you know where your aunt gets her money?' I asked.

'Of course! It is family money. Uncle Nikki left her a big pile.' She described a big pile with her hands.

'And Uncle Adolph?'

'Do you know him, too? But I don't like him. He is a mean man, but also rich.'

'You don't know where his money comes from?'

'Certainly. I've just told you. Uncle Nikki.'

'All right. If that's what you believe, it's good enough for me. Now point No. 2. You must not tell your uncle or your aunt or *anybody* that I am not Connie Chancellor. You must not even tell them that you have seen me – that we are friends.'

She tossed her head scornfully. 'What is all this mystery? I guess that I am the best judge of what I shall tell my own relatives!'

'Diane, listen to me!' I pleaded. I reached across the table and put my hand on hers. 'You must do as I ask. It is vital to me. If we can't get this small point settled between us, then there's not going to be much hope for anything else. In fact, there won't be anything else.'

She looked at me gravely for a moment, then gave a short laugh. 'You are so serious! Well, nevertheless, I will do it my way. I think that you need somebody to take care

of you, and I think that it might as well be me. So let's have no more of this nonsense.'

I shook my head at her. What was the use? I couldn't convince her unless I told her too much. And even if I were so foolish as to do that, even then she wouldn't have believed. How could anyone have believed such a fantastic tale as I would tell about dear, sweet, harmless Isabella and her tycoon brother Adolph?

'Let's go back to Paris,' I said.

'Fine. I think we have been in the country long enough.'

We climbed down out of our tree and strolled arm in arm to the Rolls. Sasha helped us in, then started back the way we had come. 'The Alfortville,' I told Sasha. He turned around and gave me a look, then stepped on the gas.

'What did you tell him?' Diane asked.

'The Alfortville.'

'What's that?'

'A hotel - on the Rue de Madrid.'

Diane moved away from me slightly. She kept her eyes cast down. 'Why a hotel?' she asked. Her voice was barely audible.

'It's not what you think,' I said hastily. 'I - well, I'll explain it to you when we get there.'

'You'll explain it now,' she said. 'What do you think I am, some cheap *poule* that you pick up on the streets?'

'No,' I said. I wanted to tell her a lot of things. But I was getting annoyed and I thought it best to shut up.

'Well—?'

'I want you to meet somebody. It's all very proper. Stop jumping at conclusions.'

Suddenly she smiled at me. And it seemed that I remembered every time I got angry at her, she stopped being angry at me. 'That is not very complimentary,' she said.

'What isn't?'

'That you don't *want* to take me to a hotel.'

'Well, what did you get upset for, then?'

'Because,' she said. Then she took my arm and sat closer to me. 'You Americans don't know much about French girls, do you?'

The rest of the ride into town was pleasant. We arrived in front of the Alfortville in less than an hour. Diane told me she had until seven-thirty, when she was supposed to be in her dressing room at the Théâtre Pleyel. She continued to tease me about the hotel, and when we arrived in the lobby she suddenly drew back from me and announced loudly, 'I will not go up to your room, *monsieur*!'

There was a fat, sleek clerk behind the desk and a *chasseur* by the door and they both looked at us with their eyebrows away up.

'But my grandmother is waiting to meet you,' I said.

'Your grandmother!' she said.

The clerk came from behind his desk, looking at Diane doubtfully. She was laughing now and she took my arm. He asked, 'Mr Chancellor?'

'Yes.'

He handed me a key. 'Eighty-seven,' he said. 'It's on the top floor.' Then he turned quickly and walked back to his desk.

We went up in the elevator. 'I bet I shook him,' Diane said.

We got off at the top floor and walked down a long corridor. Eighty-seven was at the end. I opened the door and Diane entered. I took the key out, put it in my pocket, and followed. We were in a large sitting room, tastefully furnished and comfortable. Diane stood in the centre of the room and looked around. Then she moved to an open door and looked into a bedroom of about the same size, which had a huge four-poster bed occupying half the space. She moved in and sat on the edge of the bed, punching her hand at the mattress. She looked about her. I stood in the doorway a moment. I went to one of two long windows and opened it. There was a narrow balcony

that seemed to run all along that side of the building. Below was a large courtyard with a small garden in the centre. I turned around and looked at Diane. She was lying back on the bed.

'Where are your friends?' she asked me, looking up at the ceiling.

'They'll be along.'

I sat down on the other side of the bed and looked down at her. Suddenly she raised her arms up to me. 'Kiss me,' she said. I did. That first one, back there in her dressing room, was a mere nothing, a dim carbon of this one. This was the real thing, and she held me so tightly in her strong arms that we were no longer two, but just a single being.

Then she rolled away from me a little. 'You have no friends coming up here, have you?' she asked.

'No.'

She looked at Judy's wrist watch, flipping its golden lid open with the little button. She let it snap shut and turned her head, to look at me with smouldering eyes. Then she sat up and jumped off the bed. She walked into the bathroom and the door slammed shut.

I got up slowly and walked out of the bedroom, closing the door behind me. I walked across the living room, picking up my hat from a table where I'd tossed it. I went out the door of the apartment, locking it behind me with the key. Then I took the elevator to the lobby.

You know how I felt? Brother!

IX

I was thinking too much about Diane. I wasn't tending to my business. I wasn't watching out for Wright Hughey and his precious neck or for anybody else's precious neck. What a hell of a time to fall for a French cutie-pie! I

touched back at my apartment. No messages. The *concierge* was still as unpleasant as ever, but I thought I detected friendliness in those sombre eyes. I asked her if she thought it would be a good idea for me to use her phone. She nodded assent and led me into her lodge. Her living room was filled with women and kids. They stopped their yattering and gamboling to stare at me suspiciously. I sat on a chair by a small table and dialled a number I hadn't used before. A woman answered.

'Geneva,' I said. 'Any messages?'

'Where are you calling from?'

I gave her the number.

'Don't use that phone again,' she said. 'Belgrade wants you at Monceau Metro station at seven-thirty. Miss Deprez will call your horie before nine.'

I hung up the phone, nodded to the women and the kids, thanked the *concierge*, and left. I had an hour to kill. I walked down the Rue du Bac to the Seine, passing the Sicilione, then across the Pont Royal and through the Tuileries, up the Rue des Pyramides, up the Avenue de l'Opera, along the Grands Boulevards to the Rue Montmartre. I was still thinking about Diane, chewing over everything she had said and how I felt about her and what I intended to do about her. I stopped in the bar of a large café and had a beer. I looked at my watch. 7:15. I paid for my *demi* and hurried out. I jumped in a cab and told the driver to take me to the Monceau Metro on the Boulevard Courcelles. And *vite*. I got there with less than a minute to spare. I walked down the stairs and bought a *carnet* of first-class tickets. Franklin followed me at the window. I counted my change and stalled until he walked by me. I followed him down the steps to the train platform.

A train rumbled in. We entered the first-class compartment. It was about half full. He stood by one door, I at another. At Victor Hugo, there were about a half dozen people left. He sat on one of two single seats facing each

other, opposite a small man with a big moustache. The remaining passengers got out at Porte Dauphine, end of the line. Franklin motioned to me and I sat in the seat opposite him. The train doors closed but we did not move immediately.

'What the hell did you do to that girl?' he asked me.

'Diane?'

'Yes. She was hysterical for an hour. We had to put her under a sedative.'

'Is she all right?'

'Yes, now. We've been able to explain things to her and she has agreed to let us take her out of Paris, but she is still one very unhappy young lady.'

'She say anything about me?'

'We'd better not go into that.' He took a large envelope out of his pocket and handed it to me. 'Here's all the information on the Boeing. The whole story's there and it will all check. There's a bill in there for \$521,000 someone will have to pay. You'd better leave it at that price. We'll have the helicopter for you within three days. In the Marseilles area. I'll give you the story and papers on that.'

I took the envelope and put it into my pocket. The train started to move. 'Look,' I said, 'about Diane—'

'We'll take care of her,' he interrupted. 'Everything's been arranged with the night club. We'll see that she'll get just as good a position later on. Maybe a better one. She seems to be quite a bright star and much in demand.'

'How about Mrs Ballu?'

'Diane has written a note to her saying she suddenly decided to go to the country to rest. . . . It will all check out. Stop worrying.'

'What did she say about me?'

'Well - I'll sum it up for you. You are all the things she ever called you before, multiplied by ten. She will never see you again. *Fini!*' He dug into his pocket and came up

with Judy's bracelet watch. He handed it to me. 'She asked me as a personal favour to throw this at you.'

The train had made a loop and had come to a halt at the other side of the same station. I put the watch in my pocket and got off. I forgot to say good-bye to Franklin. I went up to the street and got a cab back to the Boulevard Raspail. I wasn't in a mood for any more Metros.

I went up to my apartment and looked over the stuff on the plane. They'd left nothing out. There were interior and exterior drawings, load distribution charts, power load charts, and all other technical information that might have been of use. There was a big legal document constituting a transfer of title, the new owner left blank. This had been executed, nevertheless, and had official stamps and seals on it. Then there was a twelve-page 'story' for me to memorize – the how, the when, the where. I went to work on that. I found out whom I had bought the plane from and when I was to present the title, with the new owner's name filled in, of course. I memorized names and telephone numbers and places I'd been – an entire itinerary that covered the hours from noon to eight. Then I looked at my watch. 9:10.

I wondered why Judy hadn't called. It was unlike any of the DICA personnel to miss an appointment. I picked up my phone and dialled her number, just on the chance—
'Hello.'

It was a strained voice, like Judy's, but not like it.

'Judy?' I asked.

'You have a wrong number. Mr Belgrade does not live here.' Click went the phone. Dead.

I started to dial again, then it hit me. Belgrade!

I swung out that apartment door and took the stairs two at a time to the bottom. Judy was in trouble! I ran to the street door, sliding to a stop and punching the button. It was clicked open. I was on the sidewalk, running. There was a cab stand at the corner and I hit the side of a cab,

then yanked the door open and piled in. '*Vingt-six Quai d'Orleans. Ile St Louis. Vite! Vite! Vite!*'

The driver had an enormous nose, thick glasses, and fast reflexes. He caught the urgency in my voice and we were away from there like a shot. I kept yelling '*vite*' at him, like a fool, but I needn't have. He shot in and out of a series of narrow streets with no regard for life, limb, safety, or the rules of the road. He was lucky, and so was I. There was little traffic and none of it where it shouldn't have been for our mad course. We swung across a *quai*, across a bridge, and we were on the Ile St Louis. He kept going, around corners, down streets so narrow that there was barely room to pass the buildings. Then we were back beside the river again and he braked to a stop. I was on the sidewalk before the cab had settled.

I banged the door shut. Then something made me look up. I'd never been to Judy's apartment; I knew only the address and that it was on the Ile St Louis. I didn't know whether her windows were up or across or down. But something made me look up.

High up near the top, almost over my head, there was a black shape pressing against the iron railing of a small balcony in front of a window. Then there was a sudden piercing scream, a desperate scream. The black shape on the little balcony seemed to separate and a part of it came hurtling down. It was bringing the scream with it, a cry of utmost terror. I stepped back against the cab and there was a loud, sickening thud at my feet. I glanced down and saw a white arm, the fist clenched. I don't remember seeing anything but that arm and that clenched fist. I was running again. I was in a courtyard, then up a couple of steps and through double doors. I saw an elevator shaft but kept past it, pounding hard. I started up a winding stairway, taking the stairs two and three at a time. I was counting the landings but I didn't know I was counting them. Some part of my mind that had cut me off from its awareness

was making the computations and was carrying me to a certain landing and a certain door. Then there flashed into my mind a picture of hair, black girl's hair that I knew very well, and two trim, silk-stockinged legs lying bent at a grotesque angle. I shuddered but I kept driving up, aware of nothing but the drive, the urge.

I got there, before a door. I tried the handle. It opened. I walked into a large, square room, lit only by the moon and the stars through the open window that looked onto the small balcony with the iron railing. I felt around the door and found a light switch, which I clicked on. The room was in some disorder. Two chairs were overturned. A small writing desk was open and its papers were strewn over the floor.

But the room was empty. I went to a bedroom, with a big double bed in the centre of a wall and a *chaise longue* in front of the long window overlooking the Seine and Paris. There was a dressing-table with its mirrored lid up, the compartment filled with bottles and creams. Two drawers were open, the contents spilled out. There was a dresser and its drawers were open, with silks and sweaters and scarves and dresses hanging from them.

The bedroom was empty too. So was the bathroom and so were the closets. I went back to the living room and looked around. Nothing. What would have been left? Why should Pindar leave anything – or Brandeli? There was no doubt in my mind that those two had been here. Pindar had beaten her before he had killed her – the violent and perverted attack of a sexual psychopath. That also I was certain of. He had beaten her and Brandeli had ransacked the apartment, hunting for – what? Evidence that she was working with the police? But they had that evidence, or else why should they have killed her?

I didn't stop to think these thoughts out. I turned off the light in the living room, then went to the window and looked down. The cab was there by the curb. A half a

dozen people were in a small knot between it and the building. Others were converging on the spot. Two gendarmes were pedalling hard on their bicycles around the corner. And Judy? Just a dark mass on the sidewalk. I backed into the room and started to straighten it up. I worked fast, got all the papers picked up and the furniture righted. Then I went into the bedroom and stuffed the things back into the drawers, closing them.

I locked the apartment and started down the stairs. No more running. No more panic with my mind whirling beyond control. Inside me there was a growing, surging anger, but it was a calm anger and very near, I would suppose, to a kind of madness. It threw an entirely different light on everything – upon DICA and my job with them and upon the criminal underworld we were combatting. No longer was there anything vague and abstract about this evil that they perpetrated or the fatal ends of their purpose. Now it was personal and real, something I could feel and taste. Something I could strike back at, that I could fight now with their own rules. So they wanted to kill. Fine.

The lights went on in the stair well and the lift started up. I ducked into a hallway until it passed, then continued down. I stopped at the front door of the building and looked around the courtyard. The door to the street was open and there were several people out there talking to the *concierge*. At the rear of the courtyard was an auto repair shop with the double doors open and the lights on. A man in grease-stained coveralls was standing by the door looking in my direction. I headed for him. He asked me something in French and I told him haltingly that a woman had fallen from a window. I could see beyond him a ramp leading from the shop up to the next street, which was on a higher level than the *quai*. I bade him good night and headed for the ramp. He yelled something after me but I kept going. There was a sliding door at the head of the ramp, locked with a latch. I opened it, slipped

quickly to the sidewalk, then closed it. I hurried down the narrow street, turned the first corner, and got over to the other side of the island. I spotted a bridge a block away and walked fast, crossed the bridge to the Right Bank, walked along the *quai* and found a *tabac*. I went in there and phoned. I called the Invalides number. The man answered.

'One-twenty-five Judy Deprez apartment,' I said, then hung up.

I called the Klèber number and got a woman's voice.

'Geneva – record it.'

'What number?'

'Never mind. Record it.'

'*Entendu.*'

A plan of procedure had partially formed in my mind. It was still rough, but some of the components were clear. 'Make Judy suicide,' I said. 'No retaliation. I will carry through Gratz deal alone. Geneva.'

I walked along the *quai* for a mile, getting one or two attitudes properly solidified, but avoiding any specific planning. It was not that kind of a deal. There was no way I could know beforehand what I should do or how, but if I approached each problem as it arose with sufficient logic and determination, then I would be able to improvise satisfactorily. Well, now I had the determination.

I crossed the Seine and got back to my apartment. There were a lot of people around that end of the Boulevard Raspail. The kind of people who stood around in doorways and looked preoccupied, or who walked purposefully for a little distance, then suddenly stopped to look in a window. There were a lot of cars parked, too. I didn't see any DICA radio car. So what? I went through the courtyard. There was the usual light in the *concierge's* lodge but no one was in sight. I went up the elevator and got out at the top. I opened the door. It opened as usual, with my key. I turned on the light with the switch in the hall.

Nothing out of the ordinary there. I walked into the living room. That was not as usual. I had company.

There were two gentlemen with well developed arm muscles who grabbed me as I came through the living room door. They weren't fooling around. They twisted my arms up behind my back with painful vigour and led me to the love-nook, sitting me on the couch. I didn't get a chance to examine their features, but each wore well-cared for shoes.

Then Gratz came into the room from the bedroom, a revolver in his hand. When he saw that things were under control, he put the gun in his pocket and strode over to me. There was still that sad, blood-hound look on his face, but also there was a new and a different Gratz there. He had become a man of action, one who gave the orders.

'Well,' he said, 'and how are you this evening?'

'Fine.'

He looked down at my feet. 'You still don't wear my shoes?'

'No. They still don't fit.'

'Something is going on here that I don't know anything about,' he said. 'Now we will find out. Who are you?'

'Chancellor.'

He stepped closer and slapped my face. He had hard, bony hands, ideal for slapping. 'Who are you?'

'Chancellor.'

Whack! Again. Whack! Again. Whack! My head began to ache.

'You are going to be difficult,' he said, 'but that will not concern us too much. We are prepared for that. I think that you will talk. . . . What did you do to Willy Dorffman?'

So! That was it! 'He is well and healthy.'

'He is dead!' He gave me another one, harder this time. I managed to ride with it, then shook my head at him.

'If that's all you want, I will get him for you. He is not dead.'

'You will get him for me! Now, when it is too late! When we have lost everything!' He was yelling at me hysterically. He started to pace back and forth in front of me. His two assistants tightened up on my arms and I had to lean forward. 'Pindar got the gold! Now he has bought us out! Do you understand? We have no more supplies. Pindar controls it all, from Hamburg to Constantinople!'

'There are still the Russians,' I said.

It was the wrong thing. It really infuriated him. He fumbled the gun out of his pocket, stepped up to me, and crashed it on the side of my head. The next thing I was aware of was a blackness with red spots in it. Something cold was pouring over my head. I opened my eyes and saw water dripping from my head onto the red carpet. Gratz and his two helpers were ranged in front of me. I tried to move my arms and discovered they were firmly tied.

'Make him talk,' said Gratz. 'We have been here long enough.'

I shook the water from my head and looked up at him. 'You want Dorffman back?' I asked him.

'We will get Dorffman back if he is alive! . . . If we have to kill all the rest of you.'

'He won't stay alive five minutes if you kill me,' I said. 'Why don't you get smart and make a deal?'

He backed up to a chair and sat in it, looking at me sadly. 'Pindar will make no deals with us and you know it. You, we can't trust. You, we won't trust. So, what kind of a deal?'

'Pindar knows nothing about Dorffman.'

That shook him, 'You are lying!'

'No. Willy is my pigeon. I have him and I will give him back to you. But lay off Pindar. Nothing is to happen to him.'

'You think I will let him control all our supplies!'

'That's your problem. If you had gold, you could still buy out the Russians. Gold is all they want.'

'How much gold did you have in mind, Mr Whatever-Your-Name-Is? We can't get any more gold in Europe.'

'I can get it. You've got 14,000 ounces coming to you.'

'But you want morphine! We haven't got that now!'

'No, money. I don't care about M or H.'

'That's right. I forget you are not Chancellor. . . . How is it that you look so much like him?'

I ignored that. 'I will get you the gold. I will give you Willy Dorffman. Just keep out of my hair. And keep away from Pindar.'

'At what price?'

'For the gold? Twenty-three thousand francs an ounce. Or sixty-five dollars.'

'I will give you sixty if you will take marks or guilders.'

'O.K. Call it a deal.'

He got up. He didn't like it, but he didn't have much choice. 'First, I want the consignment you have promised. Fourteen thousand ounces. That is due Wednesday. Then I want twenty thousand ounces more. I want Willy Dorffman by tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. But I do not trust you. I will tell you that next time I will kill you. You lie to me once more, that is the end. Am I clear?'

'Yes, you are clear.'

He was still unsatisfied. He kept walking around. 'I don't understand this with Pindar,' he said. 'You work for him, no?'

'Not any more.'

He stopped in front of me and pointed a finger at me. 'You lie again! You work with Brandeli!'

I shook my head at him. 'Not with Brandeli.'

He muttered to himself in German. 'Suppose Brandeli is dead?'

'Well, suppose he is? It's nothing to me.'

That upset him all over again. He spoke roughly in

German to his two companions. Then he turned back to me and made a speech.

'You double-cross everybody! Now you double-cross Pindar again. You double-cross Brandeli and you double-cross Dorffman! So I will tell you something. You will try to double-cross Gratz also, and Gratz will kill you.' He waved a hand at his two aides. 'Untie him.'

You'd think that was enough for one night. But it turned out to be much longer and more active. There was a deep cut on my temple from Gratz's gun, and I got that to stop bleeding. Then I washed up, changed my clothes, and started out again. The light was still on in the *concierge's* lodge and no one was visible. I went in and found her tied up in her dining-room, on the floor. There was a cruel gag in her mouth and the ropes tied around her ankles and arms had bitten deep into her fat flesh. She thanked me over and over again for freeing her, but mostly she was angry and vocal about it, using a lot of bitter argot that I didn't understand. She rubbed her ankles and her arms while she sounded off, then turned suddenly and picked up the telephone. Somebody was going to catch hell. I left and got to the street, turning towards the Rue du Bac and the Boulevard St Germain. Very few people were about and the number of cars parked had diminished considerably. Still no DICA radio car. When you needed one, it was never around. So I'd have to phone. I legged it up to St Germain des Pres and went into the Select. I dialled Archive and got a man's voice.

'Geneva. Need a one-twenty immediately.'

'We've been waiting for you. Orly Airport departure gate. As soon as you can get there.'

I hung up and went out to the street. There was a cab waiting in the centre of the boulevard and I got in. I was at Orly in about twenty minutes. A line of late travellers were boarding the night plane for London. I walked

through the queue and found Burleigh and Delong on the other side of the gate. I walked up to them. 'There was nothing friendly in their greeting. Delong handed me an envelope and said, 'Get on this plane.'

I pushed the envelope aside.

'You're out of your fat mind,' I said. 'I'm getting on no plane. I'm busy.'

'You've *been* busy all right,' said Burleigh bitterly. 'What did you expect to accomplish with Brandeli except your own suicide?'

'Brandeli?' I said. 'Let's not waste time with him. You are to release Willy Dorffman before eight a.m. The gold deal stands for Wednesday, fourteen thousand ounces. I'll need twenty thousand ounces more, if we're still in business another month. Now then, you've got to keep Pindar and Gratz apart—'

Delong grabbed my arm and moved me away from the crowd, with Burleigh coming up on the other side of me.

'Talk sense!' Delong growled at me. 'We're not going to release Dorffman. You're all through, my boy. Get on that plane and get out of here. Get out of France. You won't live an hour when Pindar catches up with you.'

'No?' I said. 'How long do you think Pindar's going to live when I catch up with him?'

'Enough heroics,' said Burleigh. 'He's hunting for you now. Why did you kill Brandeli?'

So that was it! That's what Gratz had been talking about!

'I didn't,' I said.

'Don't lie to us!' exclaimed Delong.

What was the matter with everybody? Had they all gone crazy, and DICA along with them? I grabbed Delong by his shirt and pushed him hard, catching him as he started to go off balance. 'Watch it!' I told him. Burleigh moved close to me, ready to try to take me. 'Damn it, listen

to me! I didn't kill Brandeli! Not that I wouldn't have, but I've been too busy. Stop talking like a couple of idiots! With Brandeli dead, we've all got to move fast. I know what I have to do. Leave me alone! Go and release Dorffman! I tell you this operation is getting critical! You've got to work with me!

I let go of Delong's shirt and he moved back a step, straightening his clothes. Burleigh stepped to his side and took his arm, moving him away from me. I took a quick look around and saw that suddenly we were not alone. At least six hard characters had closed in on us, and all of them had their eyes on me. I recognized four of the faces from around the DICA headquarters.

Burleigh and Delong talked in low voices for a moment. Then they came back to me, moving in close. 'Come with us,' said Burleigh. 'We'll show you something.'

We left the waiting room and went out to the passenger-loading platform. There was a black Ford there with a driver behind the wheel. We three got into the back seat and Delong told the driver to go to the Quai du Louvre and the Pont Neuf. We were there in twenty-five minutes and got out, walking down stone steps in the river wall to a landing near the bridge. Gendarmes and plain-clothes men were all about the area and down on the landing, but we were not stopped or even apparently recognized. We walked towards the bridge arch and came upon a dark object spread upon the ground. There was no one around it. Burleigh bent down and threw back a tarpaulin, then shone a small flashlight for me to see. It shone on the dead face of Pretty-Boy Mario Brandeli, his hair in wet ringlets, the lids over his soft eyes. Burleigh moved the tarpaulin farther down and his flash picked out the hilt of a knife sticking from between the ribs on his left side, where his heart was. He pointed to the knife with his finger, then turned off the flash.

'It's an American hunting knife,' he said, 'a kind not

often seen in Europe. It's the type of knife one might have found among Chancellor's effects.'

We moved back towards the stairs. 'Stop jumping at conclusions,' I said. 'I got to Judy's apartment after I'd phoned, and she had said "Belgrade does not live here". There was a shadow up on the balcony, then part of it came tumbling down and it was Judy. I didn't see anyone, not Brandeli and not Pindar, but Pindar is the one who killed her. I know that. I went up and straightened the place, cleaning up after them, then left fast. I phoned Invalides and Klèber, then I went to my apartment and I was stuck up by Gratz and two of his boys.' I pointed to the cut on my temple. 'I got this. I made a deal on Dorffman and the gold. They asked me about Brandeli, whether we worked together. I told them no and that surprised them. But they knew he was dead. I didn't realize it then but I know it now. So they killed him. They were going to get Brandeli and Pindar and me for the doublecross on Dorffman. That's why we give them Dorffman back - to save Pindar and to save me - but I figure Dorffman will try to get me anyway. So that's my problem. But Dorffman and Gratz! I didn't know about that combination. Neither did you. They're a hard outfit and Gratz is running it. You were wrong about him. He's back in business in a big way and he has solid connections. He's not afraid of anybody down on Pindar's level. Also he suspects I'm not Chancellor, and sooner or later, if we all live that long, he and Dorffman are going to decide we must be the police. I've got too much power they won't be able to account for. But let Dorffman go now. I'll handle him when he comes back for more. Where's Diane?'

We were at the top of the steps, by the Ford. Burleigh said, 'All right, Chancellor, carry on. Diane's in a villa near St Tropez with a couple of our women.'

I nodded at him and walked away. I flagged down an empty cab coming along the Rue du Pont and gave the

driver the address of the Sicilione on the Rue du Bac. There was no one in front of the hotel when I got out of the cab. I walked into the lobby, into the arms of a welcoming committee.

X

Four of us crowded into the small elevator and started up. I knew Lupe but not the other two. One of them had a familiar face and I knew that I'd seen a picture of him at DICA, but his name would not come back to me. He was a stocky one, built like Lupe, but a couple of inches taller and with more intelligent looking eyes. The third one had the same general colouring and facial contours as Brandeli, but was several years older. He was the angry one. He had spit at me as we got into the elevator. As we rose above the main floor, expert hands felt about my pockets and body to make certain I was not armed. Then the one who looked like Brandeli suddenly produced a knife and pointed it at my nose. He spat out an Italian phrase at me, which I assumed to be a curse. Lupe spoke harshly to him in guttural French and, after he had glared at me for a moment, he put the knife away. By that time we had reached the top.

It's easy to be wrong about these people. I had a Boeing transport plane in my pocket and a plan to pull all of their walnuts out of the squirrel hole, so I was not worried about three hoodlums and the vicious Pindar. Also, and as a matter of fact, I had not killed Brandeli. But what good did a clear conscience do me? As I stepped off the elevator in the wake of the Italian, the stocky one moved up beside me and let me have it right on my cut temple. It must have been a blackjack because it drew the curtain fast and dark.

I was in a small and very cold room with my arms and legs tied to a chair. There was a strong light somewhere that gave me the sensation of a pink glow before I opened my eyes and spotted it on a table – a bare globe in a table-lamp without a shade. My face felt as though it had been run through a meat grinder and all the ribs on my right side gave forth with painful protest when I tried to move. Somebody, while I had been passed out, had been kicking me. Pindar maybe.

Then I heard a door open and a big shadow moved between me and the light. I looked up. Pindar. He was smiling, as though he liked the way I looked.

‘So you’ve come around?’ he asked. ‘Pretty tough, eh?’

‘You’ve just made one hell of a mistake,’ I told him – or tried to tell him. It didn’t sound like my voice. It came out mushy and almost unintelligible.

‘What was that?’

I repeated it, more slowly and carefully.

His smile widened, ‘You’ve made the mistake, Chancellor. Your last, final mistake.’

‘Get Lauderbach,’ I said slowly. ‘Get Lauderbach and I’ll tell you both something.’

‘Don’t you worry, he’s on his way over now,’ he said angrily, his smile suddenly vanishing. ‘We’re going to settle this tonight!’

He moved abruptly out of my line of vision, and I heard the door open and close. I closed my eyes and went to sleep. Or passed out.

They were carrying me. It was a restful, swinging motion and I hoped that it would continue, but suddenly it stopped with a jar as my chair was set on the floor. The bright light and the pinkness were missing. I opened my eyes again and looked around slowly. It took a long time to focus on objects at first. I saw a long table of light wood in front of me. There was a light overhead – a chandelier. At the other end of the table was a familiar face, but it

was foggy down there. I squinted for a moment, then I recognized it. Lauderbach. To his right was Pindar. I recognized him immediately.

Someone standing behind me wiped my face with a cold, wet towel. My torn flesh stung but it felt good. I put out my tongue and wet that. When I looked at the other end of the table again, I could see more clearly.

'He killed Brandeli and he was going to kill me,' said Pindar. 'That girl he had works with the police. It is not the local police or the *Sûreté* – some other organization we know nothing about. Lefevre showed me copies of two orders about her given to Delahouse at the *Sûreté*. They were from Delahouse's secret files; there is no doubt about their authenticity. We warned him but he refused to give her up. This evening I – we got rid of her. Brandeli and I. It was not a thing I would entrust to anyone else. I thought that we had been followed but I was not sure. We separated there – on the Ile St Louis – right afterwards. Brandeli was killed not a hundred yards away and his body thrown into the river. Visseron was parked in the car just at the south end of the island and he saw it, but he was too far away to help. There is the one who killed him. Chancellor.'

'Why was I not told about this girl before?' demanded Lauderbach.

'You know about her. Judy Deprez.'

Lauderbach nodded his head. 'That one,' he said. Then he looked at me.

'You killed Brandeli?' he asked.

I tried shaking my head, but that hurt too much. 'No,' I croaked. 'Gratz killed him.'

Pindar jumped out of his chair. 'What?' he demanded. 'What did you say?' Gratz! He leaned far over the table towards me, his face working furiously.

'Gratz and two of his boys,' I said. 'Then they came after me, in my apartment. But I was able to make a deal

with him. I told him to leave you alone, and that's part of the deal.'

Pindar straightened up and turned to Lauderbach. 'What about Gratz?' he asked in a controlled voice.

'He is back,' said Lauderbach. 'You will just have to put up with it. Those are the orders.'

Pindar sank down in his chair, a look of defeat on his face. Well, to hell with him and his problems. I had my own. My voice was working much better and I put some steam into it.

'All right, damn it, untie me!' I said.

Lauderbach looked at me for a moment with his glittering eyes, then poked Pindar with a finger. 'Untie him,' he said. 'And I won't blame him if he kills you one day. . . . You are sometimes a stupid man, Pindar. You have not handled this well.'

Someone behind me began cutting the ropes and in a moment I was free. I rubbed my ankles first, but I straightened up too fast and the pain in my side soared. I stood carefully and found that I could walk slowly if I didn't make any sudden movements.

'I want proof that it was Gratz and not Chancellor,' said Pindar. 'Why should we believe him?'

'Get him off my neck,' I told Lauderbach. 'Get someone to take me home. Get someone to take care of me, too, now that your friend Pindar's got rid of Judy. And call my Boss and explain why I won't be there in the morning. Maybe you can think of a good story. You'd better, with all the time we've got to work with.'

Then I collapsed.

Lauderbach had called his sister from Pindar's, and I was taken to her Avenue Foch mansion in Lauderbach's blue Cadillac. Apparently she had blown her top at him, for he fussed over me like a hen after a doctor had brought me around again, and he was even shorter than before with

Pindar. Lupe and the Italian helped me out to Lauderbach's car. The ride across Paris with a cool breeze blowing through the open windows restored me wonderfully.

A couple of Mme Ballu's amazons helped me from the car into the mirrored foyer and through a door that was completely disguised to an elevator. We got off on the second floor and I was taken into a huge bedroom and undressed by the amazons with unblushing efficiency and put into flowered silk pajamas, then tucked into a great, soft bed. Mme Ballu, in a turquoise dressing-gown trimmed with masses of ostrich feathers, came in and sat in a chair beside the bed.

'You look terrible,' she said with sympathy. 'How do you feel?'

'Not too bad. I'll be all right in a day or so.'

She clucked over me for a few minutes, then got around to what was on her mind. She was one who was always looking out for Mme Ballu.

'Tell me about Herr Gratz,' she said.

I told her about his visit to my apartment with his two assistants. I told her most of what he had said and what I had said, particularly about Brandeli. I mentioned the fact that he wanted gold, but I left out the part about Willy Dorffman.

'So you promised him gold and he agreed to let you go?' she asked.

'Yes, that's what happened.'

'Where are you getting this gold?'

'Frankie Vidal. I've already made the arrangements.'

'And how are you getting it over here?'

'By ship. It's due Monday or Tuesday at the latest.'

'You were going to tell me about that?'

'Yes, of course. About the gold and the plane. You want to hear about the plane now?'

'No. I want to hear about Gratz. What else?'

She knew there was something else. She knew the gold

wouldn't have done it – that that wasn't enough currency to have bought my life. So, how much did she know?

'There was Willy Dorffman,' I said. 'I'd made a deal with him – before I went to America the last time – for morphine. You probably know something about that by now, or at least you suspect. I was going to turn over the Jaguar to Gratz, then use his money to get M and H from Dorffman. Well, I changed my mind about that. There were a lot of reasons, one of which was that it wasn't smart. But I'll tell you something else. I found out I was being taken. That Dorffman and Gratz were working it together, that I was going to be the sucker. So I decided to call it off. I met Dorffman here in Paris, when he came back from Constantinople. I told him the deal was off. He wasn't having it that way. He jumped me, and so I put him away for safe keeping, with friends of mine. He's there right now. My friends will let him go in a few hours. That was the rest of the deal with Gratz.'

She nodded her head and sat there thinking. Then she gave me a hard look. 'You have many talents, Mr Chancellor. I never would have suspected that it was you who kidnapped Willy Dorffman. . . . Well, well, well!' She got up and drew her robe about her. 'A kidnapper, too! This will bear looking into.'

She left me stewing over that remark. Had she found out about Diane? Had DICA's story backfired already and did Mme Ballu know that her niece was missing? The rest of that night was a miserable one, with not more than ten minutes of sleep. The long hours dragged and the plans and counterplans, the fears and the doubts pounded through my head like the slap of the surf on a rocky coast. Like the pounding of the ancient engines of the forgotten *Sarah V. Lovejoy*, which was by now well on her way up the coast of Central America, headed for San Francisco. Where I should have been.

By six the huge window facing the south had turned

light and the luxurious furniture of the room began to emerge from its shadows. My head ached, my ribs ached, and my tongue felt eight sizes too large and covered with sandpaper. I got up and found the bathroom and drank a half a gallon of cold tap-water. I shuffled around for ten or fifteen minutes, getting my joints loosened up, then got back into bed. By seven a ray of sunlight had found its way through a corner of the window drapes and was marking a golden oblong on the silver-grey carpet. I was hungry. I found a bell beside the bed and pushed its ivory button. Presently the cute little maid appeared with a tray of coffee, *croissants*, rolls, strawberry jam, butter, and a carnation. I ate everything but the flower and felt much better. I looked around for my clothes but there were none.

At eight-thirty one of the amazons came in with my suit, which had been cleaned, pressed, and mended, and with the rest of my things all washed and ironed, the shoes shined, and even the necktie cleaned. The service was excellent *chez* Mme Ballu. I took a shower and then got dressed. At nine a doctor came in and I got undressed again while he examined me. He taped up my ribs and swabbed off various cuts with antiseptic, putting a bandage on my temple, another on my chin, and one on my chest. I put my clothes back on and an amazon led me down to *madame's* bath.

Madame was as before, except that the bikini was red instead of pink. She was as before except that she wasn't so friendly. The desk had been brought in and Mlle Constantine was in her chair. She gave me a cheerful good morning and I sat.

'Shouldn't you stay in bed?' asked Mme Ballu.

'The doctor didn't say anything and I feel O.K.,' I replied. 'You want to hear about the plane now?'

'Lewison and his man are on their way here,' she said. 'You will tell them.'

I started to read the *Herald Tribune* which was on the desk. 'I have been looking you up,' said Mme Ballu. 'Are you certain you were born at 8:30?'

'Yes,' I replied. 'Right on the dot.'

She shook her head in puzzlement. 'You have not such a disposition. Also there is nothing affectionate about you. I have discovered this already.'

Well, who knows where that would have led? Lewison and Jean Perrel, who had told me about Royal Franco-Iraq's planes at the first meeting, came into the bathroom. Mlle Constantine arranged chairs for them at my desk. Mme Ballu came out of her bath, put on a mink robe, and reclined on a *chaise longue* nearby.

I told them why we could not use their Armstrong-Vickers planes for our purpose and then described the kind of plane we would need.

'But we cannot obtain such planes,' said Lewison. 'The Douglas or Boeing we could not get for years.'

'I have a Boeing,' I said. 'I got it yesterday afternoon.'

'No!' exclaimed Perrel, 'that is impossible! There are none available.'

'Atlantic-Air had one in England,' I said. 'I talked to Hansen on the telephone yesterday and he has agreed to sell it to me. In fact, he has sold it to me.'

'I know Hansen,' he said. He reached for the telephone. 'I can't believe it!'

He dialled and told someone to put through a call to Magnus Hansen in London or Croydon and gave Mme Ballu's number. I looked over at her and she had a vague, faraway look on her face, as though she were not with us at all. Then she raised her eyes to mine and shook her head at me. 'Not 8:30,' she said.

'I can't understand how you could do this' insisted Perrel. 'How did you come to call Hansen?'

'Linderman in New York told me to call him.'

'Well,' he said, 'that's different. Of course, if you know

Linderman. . . . Now how much are we paying for this Boeing, Mr Chancellor?

'It's going to cost you \$521,000,' I said. 'Hansen insists upon dollars.'

'That's impossible!' Lewison exclaimed. 'It's an outrageous price for a used aeroplane! Besides, we don't have that many dollars available.'

'The deal goes through immediately,' said Mme Ballu. 'You two, Lewison and – what's your name, young man, Perrel? – you two take orders from Mr Chancellor. What he says for you to buy, you buy. And this plane – what do you call it, a Boeing? – this plane is under his orders. It flies where he says and when. Also, he will get you a helicopter which he alone will use. Do you understand that, gentlemen?'

They bowed to her and said they did. Perrel's call came through and he checked on me with Hansen. All of the answers seemed to have been supplied satisfactorily and he gave me a broad smile when he had hung up.

'The plane will be over at Orly tomorrow or Monday,' he said. 'And he is painting our name on it.'

'I'll have the bill of sale and the title in your hands by Monday,' I said. 'The plane will take off Monday night for America. We'll keep Hansen's crew.'

'I would not advise that,' said Lewison. 'We'd better put our own people on it.'

'No,' I said. 'I want this crew. I know all about them. They've been flying the plane for six months. We haven't time to break in new people.'

They both turned to Mme Ballu, but she was off again in the yonder with her thoughts. She had arisen from her *chaise longue* and was on her way back to her tub, taking little dance steps that were surprisingly agile and singing quietly to herself, '*Sur le pont d'Avignon. . .*'

I went back to bed after the conference. I'd begun to get

dizzy towards the end of it. What I needed was sleep. And now I felt that I could sleep, since the world had stopped briefly from coming down around my ears. Isabella had told off the boys from Royal Franco-Iraq Oil. 'Take orders from Mr Chancellor,' she had said. 'The plane flies where and when he says,' she had told them. So maybe I was still afloat in this sea of confusion. Maybe I'd gotten by Pindar and Brandeli and Lauderbach and Gratz and Dorffman and DICA. . . . Maybe Diane was still down in St Tropez where she belonged, and *madame* had not missed her at all yet. Maybe. . . . I was asleep.

I slept for a couple of hours and woke up to find one of Mme Ballu's amazons looking down at me. She asked me if I wanted anything to eat and I told her I did. She came back in a few minutes with a large tray, loaded with soup and an omelette and custard and such victuals for the ailing. I ate most of it, then went back to sleep again. The bed was deep and soft and warm. I liked this lap of luxury very much. Then there was a girl without much on in the places that counted who was sitting on a cloud-like arrangement made out of meringue dropping ball bearings into Mme Ballu's bathtub. The girl was suddenly Diane, the way I had seen her last, stretched out on that bed with hot eyes looking at me, and every time the steel balls hit the water they made a noise like a bell ringing. Silly. I reached out with my right hand and got a sharp pain in my ribs, which got me fully awake. It was morning again and there was that same golden oblong of sunlight on the carpet. My hand landed on a telephone and I lifted up the hand-piece. I said hello into it. A strange voice came back at me. One I had never heard before.

'This is Magnus Hansen. Chancellor?'

'Yeah. How are you, Magnus?'

'Thought I might get you there. Perrel left your number yesterday. We're flying the Boeing in today at one-twenty.'

'One-twenty, huh? Fine. Where?'

'Wait a minute—' Then his voice faded, as though he were talking to someone beside him. He said, 'Yeah, that's right. Gare de Lyon right away.' Then his voice came up and he said to me, 'We'll be in at Orly at the Transportation Générale hangar. You want to keep the Italian crew?'

'Yes, for the time being.'

'Good. Well, so long, Connie. On my way over to Lyon.'

'I got it. So long.'

I hung up. Then the phone rang again immediately. Mme Ballu's voice came on. She wanted me to know she had been listening, I guess. She said, 'I want to see you immediately, Connie. In my bath.'

'I'll get dressed and be right down.'

It took me fifteen minutes to get into my clothes, shave with an electric razor provided for guests, and trot down to the bathroom. Isabella was on a *chaise longue* wrapped in a mink robe, dipping into a twenty-pound box of bonbons which was on the floor at her side and reading an astrological magazine.

'How do you feel?' she asked me.

'Better, since I've slept.'

'You've had no breakfast. I'll order you some.'

'No thanks, I'm going out. I'll grab something in a café.'

'Where are you going?'

'I've got to check with a guy on that helicopter — you want it before the week-end, don't you?'

'Of course. We *must* have it! Connie—' she sat up, a serious look on her face, 'did you follow my orders about Diane Gilbert?'

Here it comes. She *did* know something.

'Yes,' I said. 'I have not seen her.'

'She called me last night. The poor girl was hysterical — down in the south somewhere.'

I shrugged at her. 'I don't know anything about it, Mme Ballu. I've been having my own troubles — where did you say she was?'

'She called me from a little town outside of Lyon. She'd got up there from St Tropez. I am having her met and brought to Paris. . . . Connie, if I find out you have seen her or had anything to do with this, I will never rest until you are dead!'

She was boring into me with those sharp eyes of hers. There was almost a madness there, a fury that made my own occasional outbursts seem pale, vapid.

'I'll never harm Diane Gilbert,' I told her. I said it as though I meant it.

It seemed to satisfy her, for the moment. She reached down, got another chocolate, and popped it into her mouth. She chewed on it absently. 'I've got an intuition about you,' she said, 'and my intuitions are never wrong. . . . I think you will stop at nothing to gain your end. Connie, what are you after?'

I shrugged at her. 'A little bit of peace,' I said. 'To have people stop hitting me on my head.'

She thought that was funny. She laughed. I got out while she was still laughing and found Sasha and the Rolls parked below. Sasha told me succinctly that his orders were to take me where I wanted to go, stick with me, and to report all my peregrinations to *madame*. I told him to take me to Duchene's garage on the Rue Lafayette. Duchene was going to be my contact on the helicopter deal, whether DICA wanted it that way or not. I had no time to make fancy arrangements. Something was popping at the Gare de Lyon, and I had an unhappy premonition what it was.

I told Sasha to remain at the garage until he heard otherwise, then got Duchene to give me another car and get me to the station fast. We left by a back-street exit to the garage and were at the *gare* in under ten minutes. I walked in through the main entrance. Crowds were entering and leaving, and I joined a stream that carried me half way into the main concourse. Hundreds of faces

were about me, all strangers. I stood there for a moment and looked around. One of the strangers, with policeman written all over his ugly face, stopped by my side and touched my arm. '*Venez avec moi,*' he said. I followed him to the side of the concourse, towards the arrival and departure gates, where there were a row of office doors. He opened one with a sign on it '*CHEF DE GARE - PRIVÉ*' and we went into a large and well furnished office. Franklin was there leaning against the desk, and three of his DICA mugs were lined up against a wall.

I said, 'Put Duchene on the helicopter deal right away. I'm supposed to be with him now. Sasha is at the garage waiting for a call. You call him and fix an itinerary for the day. Maybe a flight to London. Settle the helicopter deal today, then give me—'

He interrupted me with 'Wait a minute!' and an impatient wave of his hand. 'We've got something more important—'

'You haven't!' I shouted at him. 'Damn it, you listen to me! This is my neck on the line! We'll get to Diane Gilbert and how you kicked that one! So you couldn't keep a little one-hundred-and-ten-pound girl under wraps! All right, but first Duchene. Do you get that? *He* gets me the helicopter, and right away. I want it somewhere around Marseilles and ready to fly by Friday at the latest. Fix it. Arrange everything. Get me all of the information, cover, papers - everything - by tonight. Is that clear?'

'Yes,' he said. 'We'll do that. You're taking a hell of an—'

'Stow it, Franklin. You got me into this, so I'm going to get out of it. My way. Before you blast at me, remember what happened to Judy Deprez. All right, now Diane Gilbert. What's the story?'

'She got away last night. She slugged two women we had with her - my God that girl's powerful when she gets stirred up! We traced her to Lyon where two men met her. I would assume they are Cassegrain's thugs, from the

circumstances and the description. They arrive in Paris on the ten o'clock in a first-class compartment. Now what you've got to do is—'

I cut him off again. I knew what I had to do. 'Wait a moment, Franklin, don't tell me. You may have an excellent plan, but there are too many things you don't know. What I'm interested in now is my neck. It's come right down to that. I handle Diane. Have your boys take out the two gorillas. Leave Diane to me. Don't touch her. Don't let anyone else touch her. If she's got to be killed because she's about to wreck DICA and all of its precious work and me along with it, then I'll do it.'

He gave me a long, hard look, 'We weren't thinking of that,' he said quietly.

'You weren't!' I exclaimed. 'Well I am! I'm not going to forget what happened to Judy. To hell with how I feel about Diane! I'll rip the heart right out of her, and out of me! . . . Let's get going.'

XI

A DICA man was on the train from Lyon—to make certain Diane and her escort did not get off before Paris—and he signalled from a rear carriage as the train pulled into the station. I saw his arm waving, but it didn't mean anything to me until Franklin hurried me off in that direction. We got down the platform fast and were at the front end of his carriage by the time the train came to a halt.

The carriage doors opened. People poured out—men and women and children. Baggage was swung to the platform. The porters were threading through the crowd picking up the bags on their hand trucks.

Then I saw her.

She looked the same, her face a bit more serious,

perhaps; her mouth drawn into a firmer line. She was wearing a red beret and a light summer dress of some gaily printed cotton material. She was looking along the platform, standing behind two average hard guys who were still on the train steps. I ducked behind Franklin and her eyes passed by me. She said something to her escorts and they stepped to the train platform, towards a small knot of travellers and two porters, discussing baggage. Suddenly two of the travellers whirled and grabbed the hard guys. A third man moved up to them fast. That's all I saw of that. Diane had hesitated for an instant, a look of dismay on her face, then had taken off, running as hard as she could towards the rear of the train.

I was right after her. I was gaining on her as we reached the end of the last car, but my hurt ribs were screaming at me to stop it. I tried to put on more speed, but I had reached my limit. Anyway, that was as far as Diane would get – the end of the platform. There was a fence there that would stop her.

There was a fence there but it didn't stop her. She hand-vaulted it with ease and was off down the tracks like a gazelle. I went over the fence, too, but not with ease. I was off down the tracks after her, like a wounded elephant. My God how that girl could run! So we ran, through to the end of a tunnel and out into the sunlight, deep in the railroad cut with stone walls on each side and the half-dozen lines of shining steel rails running before us into the distance. My ribs throbbed as though a knife were sticking in them but I kept going. I was gaining again, not much but enough to raise my confidence.

She looked over her shoulder once, then stumbled. I made another five yards until she regained her balance. I felt an instant of compassion for her. But then I was angry at her again immediately. Why did she have to cause all this trouble? Why did it have to be Diane – the only person in this whole insane operation who amounted to a damn –

who was the single, fatal menace? Why did I have to catch her and – and. . . . I shook that thought out of my mind. First catch her. That was all, just catch her. Get my arms around her. Never mind for what. . . . There was the sudden, shrill blast of a train whistle. A blinding light appeared ahead, approaching at a terrific rate. It seemed to be right next to the wall where we were running. Diane swerved across the tracks, stumbling again. There was a second whistle, sharper, louder than the first. It came from the opposite direction and there was another light approaching from behind us.

Diane stopped, looked around wildly, then threw up her arms. I had crossed the first tracks, pounding as hard as I could go, and I was safe from the train coming in. I saw the other train light over my right shoulder and made a lightning calculation of the track it was on. I dived at Diane and carried her down between two tracks, praying that I had guessed right.

There was the hot blast of an engine, then the whirling dust of the coaches as the train passed almost over us, the wheels within inches of our bodies. We lay there for an instant. Diane had her eyes closed. She opened them and stared into mine, seeming not to recognize me. Then recognition came and she closed them again. She rubbed her face against my wrist.

I got to my feet and helped her up. I had my hand on her arm to steady her. 'I should have let you go,' I said. 'Then I wouldn't have any more problems.'

She nodded at me. 'But you didn't. . . . *Mon dieu!* Now I know what it is to die!' She shuddered, then collapsed for an instant against me. She straightened up and pushed away from me. 'Now what?' she asked.

I took her arm again and steered her over the track to the path beside the wall. We started walking, away from the station. So I'd had my chance and I'd muffed it! All I had had to do was to stand there, to keep away from her,

and there would have been no more fear that Diane would talk me into a quick coffin. Well, there'd be more trains along. . . .

'Now what?' she asked again.

I looked down at her. She didn't seem to be worried about anything. What a strange girl – fleeing from me in terror one minute, walking calmly beside me the next, asking with only the minimum curiosity, 'Now what?'

'You were running for your life,' I said. 'You were terrified of me. What happened? Nothing has changed. You're worse off now than you were, if possible.'

She smiled at me. 'I'm not afraid of you any more.'

There was a stairway up the stone wall, leading to the street above. There was a gate at the bottom that was locked and an iron railing running up the side of the stairway. We stopped there and looked at it. There was the blast of another train whistle. I looked down the line and saw a light hurtling towards us. Diane took my arm and backed me against the wall.

'I didn't tell Mme Ballu about you,' she said. 'I could have, you know – but I remembered how worried you were over that. . . . I didn't tell her who kidnapped me. That general – Delong. I could have told her about him.'

'That was nice of you!' I yelled at her, to make myself heard over the roar of the approaching train.

Then the train sped past us, spewing steam and dust on us. Diane hid her head in my arm. She looked up at me and poked me in my sore ribs with her fist. 'Is that all you've got to say? That was nice of me! Indeed!'

'Well, damn it, now what *am* I going to do with you?'

She smiled up at me. Another train was coming by, on the next track over. Steam was blowing out from a cylinder valve and spraying against the wall. We were getting wet.

'You haven't kissed me yet!' she yelled at me over the roar of the engine.

So I kissed her, all the way through the vapour bath of the engine and the clatter of the coaches.

We climbed over the gate and went on up the steps. There was another gate at the top, also locked, but it was too high to get over with any ease. Also, there were two gendarmes and a railroad guard standing there waiting for us.

'Ah, there you are, my pigeons,' said one of the gendarmes happily. The railroad guard opened the gate for us and we stepped through. There was a car parked at the curb with a DICA man in it – one of those I'd seen at the station. He motioned for me to come over. I shook my head at him and turned to Diane.

'Come on, we take a walk.'

'But what about the police?'

'Oh, they walk enough. Come on.'

I took her by the arm and we started off. The gendarmes and the railroad guards looked after us but said nothing and made no move to follow. Only the DICA man in his car started to trail us.

We walked fast. I remembered my sore ribs again. We walked to the next corner and I saw a one-way street ahead – '*Sens Interdit*'. I steered Diane into it and waved my hand at the DICA man, who had stopped his car at the corner. Half way down the block, I turned Diane about and we walked out of that street and headed down another one to the river. The DICA car was nowhere in sight.

'Now what?' asked Diane when we got to the *quai*.

'Stop saying that. How should I know? Give me a chance to figure it out.'

'Maybe I can help. . . . You want to know what to do with me?'

'Roughly, yes.'

'Well, wait until dark, then. We shouldn't be around Paris on a Sunday. Too many people are out and too many know me.'

'Where will we go?'

'We'll take a boat ride. *Bateau Mouche*.'

We got a cab to the Pont Solferino and she led me down to the boat landing. We sat on a bench there and watched the river. Presently a *bateau mouche* came along and we boarded it. There was a crowd aboard, but Diane found two seats at the stern just vacated by a pair of elderly tourists. She took my hand and said, 'You should act like my lover, then people will not notice us. If you sit there with that glum face, everybody will remember you.'

So I put my arm around her and we started up the Seine on this warm and beautiful August day. At another time, it would have been a delightful Sunday – without the Pindars and the Mme Ballus and the Gratzes and the Dorffmans and the ghost of Judy driving me inexorably along this road of violence. We went under the many bridges of Paris, then finally were on our way past Charenton and Alfortville. Diane's head was on my shoulder. She was sleeping peacefully, the fear, the flight, the plunging train and its death all forgotten. She had lost her red beret down on the railroad tracks and I smoothed back her soft hair. She snuggled up to me and smiled. Then she opened her eyes. She said, 'I bet that Delong is furious!'

'Without a doubt.'

'Have you thought of anywhere to hide me?'

'Yes. There's one place no one will ever hunt for you.'

'Tell me.'

'My apartment.'

'But – can I go there?'

'Sure. Easy. We just wait for dark, then check on the street outside—'

'I don't mean that,' she interrupted. 'We French girls – girls like I am – we don't do that sort of thing.'

'This is no time to worry about morals,' I said. 'Besides, I've got no plans about—'

‘Don’t you talk to me that way!’ she said, sitting up. ‘Morality, indeed! What’s that got to do with it? And after the way you walked out on me in that hotel! Don’t think I’ve forgotten that! Don’t think I’m going to forgive you for that, so quick!’

‘You’ve lost me, sweetie-pie. What did you have in mind?’

She sighed and put her head back down on my shoulder. ‘It wouldn’t look right,’ she said. ‘That’s all.’

‘Well, it might help the both of us to reach an unhappy old age.’

We went down to the bar which was at the stern just under where we had been sitting, and had cocktails for a couple of miles of river. Then we went into the dining salon and had luncheon. Fish, of course. When we got back on deck, we were passing through the area of houseboats – the thousands of French who have forsaken the land to live on water and in the sun, when there is any sun. Greetings between our passengers and the houseboat dwellers echoed across the water. The passage of the *bateau mouche* was an event in their lives that called for much vocal expression. Diane and I found a seat up near the bow. We were acting like sweethearts again, so that people wouldn’t notice us, of course. I found it not a difficult pose to maintain.

It was about sunset when we got back to the Pont Solferino. There was a phone on the *quai* and I put a call through to the D-Section recorder.

‘Diane taken care of,’ I dictated. ‘I’ll handle this from now on. Get me story on Sasha, Duchene, helicopter before midnight, my apartment. Alibi for me out of Paris must be until tonight and with Duchene. If you use flight to London get me stamped passport. Geneva.’

Diane and I took a cab to the Rue du Bac metro station. There was a café on a corner there with the *terrasse* overlooking the Boulevard Raspail and we crowded into a

small table and ordered *aperitifs*. I spotted the DICA radio car parked some fifty yards beyond the entrance to my building, but there seemed to be no strange characters lurking along the boulevard. I gave Diane my keys and told her how to get to my apartment.

'I'll stop by that green car down the street and talk to the men in it,' I said. 'You wait on the other side of the street there until I reach the car. Then you cross over and enter the outside door. If the *concierge* spots you, go into the first building on the right and up the stairs, then come down and get by her when she is not looking. I'm in the rear building, top floor, apartment thirty-nine. When you get in, leave the keys on the shelf by the door and hide. There's a little closet off the kitchen with a low door that's the best place. I'll be along in a few minutes, but I won't be alone, if I know these friends of mine and the way they operate.'

'It doesn't sound like a very good idea, if people are going to come hunting for me so quick,' she replied.

'These are not the people I am afraid of,' I said. 'I'm hiding you from someone else.'

She thought about that. Doubt came into her eyes and puckered her brow. She said, 'I hope you know what you're doing.'

'So do I, honey. If you feel like saying a prayer, mention a guy by the name of Hughey.'

'Whatever for?' she asked.

I paid for our *aperitifs* and left the *terrasse*. I strolled up the boulevard to the radio car and stopped by the open window, leaning over to put my face near that of a beetle-browed gent with a long scar on his chin. His companion, behind the wheel, was talking on a radio-telephone, apparently finishing up a report. I heard him say, '*. . . non il est tout seul.*'

I said, 'Have you got a match?'

'Beetle-brow gave me a nasty look.' 'You know you should not have speak to us,' he growled.

'So, where the hell were you Friday night when I needed you?' I asked.

He shrugged and turned away. His companion gave me a disgusted look, then leaned over to start the engine. I backed away a step, then turned and walked quickly to my building and went into the courtyard. I stopped at the *concierge's* lodge and told her I'd left my keys in my apartment. She offered me her usual scowl and started out with me.

'Any visitors for me?' I asked her.

She shook her head. '*Personne.*'

'I was expecting a girl.'

'No girls,' she said.

As we reached my building, the door to the court was clicked open. I turned around to see a familiar figure closing it. General Delong. I waited on the steps until he came up to me.

'Just on my way up,' I said. 'You want to see me?'

'I certainly do,' he replied, not pleasantly.

We three rode up in the elevator. The *concierge* opened the door. I thanked her. I picked up my keys from the shelf: 'Forgot 'em,' I said. Delong nodded and closed the door. I flicked on the lights and took him into the living room. He stood in the centre of the room looking at me.

'Where is she?' he asked, after a long pause.

'Who, Diane? She's well hidden.'

'You answer my question, Chancellor.'

'No,' I said. 'I won't answer it, general. You couldn't take care of her so now I will. One way or another. If I hadn't nailed her down on the railroad tracks, you'd be fishing me out of the Seine now, as you did Brandeli. You people are very efficient in some things, and you have a lot of power, as you've pointed out to me from time to time, but you don't know how to take care of women. First there

was Judy, and you kicked that one. Now there is Diane, and you've done your best to mess that up. Judy damned near cost me my neck, and where were you while Pindar's boys were pounding ine up in the Sicilione? Now Diane. If she'd ever got back to Mme Ballu and told her story, which she might well have done with that old dame's coaxing and threatening, I wouldn't have seen this Sunday's sunset. You want me to do this job for you, I'm doing it my way, from now on in.'

He listened to me with ill-concealed animosity, but at least he listened. When I was through he took out a cigarette and lit it, then looked around the room. Finally his eyes got back to mine and he blew out a puff of smoke in my direction. 'There's no place you could keep her alive that would be safe,' he said.

'She's in a safe place and she's going to stay there. Also she's going to stay alive, and so am I.'

He shook his head. 'I guess we made a bad mistake about you.'

'You sure as hell did, Delong. You've got yourself and DICA into the God damnedest mess since Mutiny on the Bounty. *And you can't do a thing about it!* You've got to play along with me or you'll wreck DICA and the whole cockeyed world with it. So, good-bye, general. See that I get the stuff I need before midnight.'

He gave me a small nod and walked out, closing the front door softly behind himself. I waited until I heard the elevator gate shut and the elevator start down, then went into the kitchen and called Diane from her closet.

She'd been sitting in there thinking. She came out and she asked, 'What people are you hiding me from?'

'Well, there are two groups - you could call them the good people and the bad people. The first ones we don't have to worry about much. They wouldn't do anything to you if they found you. The second bunch would get very tough, especially if they found out you'd been with me.'

‘What do you mean tough?’

‘Evil,’ I said.

‘And you think Mme Ballu is of the bad group?’

‘Yes, she is. She and Adolph Lauderbach and some others I’m going to find out about. . . . There’s a lot at stake. My life and your safety are the least of it. But if anything should happen to us right now, then everything collapses.’

She chewed over that, then started out of the kitchen. I followed her into the living room and lit a cigarette for her. She wandered about the room, testing a table for dust, trying out the window drapes, moving a chair. ‘You are wrong about Mme Ballu,’ she said, turning suddenly to face me from the bar. ‘But I see that you and your friends are very serious, so I will stay away from her for now. . . . You want to show me your love nest?’

We toured the apartment. Diane holding me by the hand. I told her about the maid who came in the mornings – that she would do all her shopping – and warned her that she was to keep out of sight and not open the door to anyone.

We were standing in the bedroom. She nodded her head, then pointed to the bed. ‘Who sleeps here?’ she asked.

‘You do,’ I said. ‘I’ll sleep on the couch.’

‘I’ve never lived with a man before. Is that the way it’s done?’

‘Yes. Sometimes.’

We walked back into the living room and I mixed a couple of scotches. She had curled up in a corner of the love nook with her arms around her knees and I carried them there and put them on the coffee table. Then I sat down near her.

Diane said, ‘Thinking about this and talking about it on the *bateau mouche* was one thing. Doing it is another.’

‘Doing what?’ I asked.

‘Moving into your apartment with you. . . . I had no idea I’d feel the way I do.’

'How do you feel, Diane?'

She picked up her drink, looking into the glass. 'Like a – well, I'm frightened, It's as though I were taking some final, decisive step in my life; as though I could never go back again.'

'You shouldn't feel that way. It's just a temporary expedient to protect the both of us.'

'Is that what you think it is?'

'Of course.'

'Do you think I would have come up here for an – an expedient?'

'Why not? Neither of us has much choice.'

'I have! I wouldn't *have* to come up here! I could have called the police any time.'

'You're talking in circles. What would the police do for you?'

'They'd get me away from you.'

'Is that what you want?'

'Don't be so smug! How do *you* know what I want?'

'I don't. I only know what I want you to want.'

'Pardon? Say that again.'

'I know what *I* want.'

'Well, what do you want?'

'Right now, you.'

'That's frank enough. Who will you want tomorrow?'

'Still you – but I've got something else to do tomorrow, too, and I'll never have you until I do it.'

'Maybe you'll never have me anyway. . . . Don't think I've forgotten the way you walked out on me in that hotel!'

'I'll never forget that either. It was the hardest thing I ever did in my life.'

'It was?'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

I could give her the answer to that, but now wasn't the

time. I decided definitely that now wasn't the time and I watched her serious, dear face for a moment. Then I said it anyway, and to hell with the time, 'Because I love you, Diane.'

She sat very still looking at me, not changing a line of her expression of polite inquiry. Then she picked up her glass and sipped it. When she looked at me again, there was a puzzled frown on her face.

'I wish you hadn't said that,' she whispered.

'You do? Why?'

'Because it's - it's too important to say that way. You say it too easily, as though it means no more than "give me a cigarette" or "please pass the bologna".'

'You want me to get down on my knees and do a histrionic somersault?'

'Pardon? Oh! No, not that - but I don't want to hear it unless you mean it.'

'You think I'd say it if I didn't mean it!'

'Why not? You've just told me that you want me. All men are alike. They will say anything, promise anything to get what they want.'

'All right, damn it! I love you and I don't want anything! What do you think of that!'

She shrugged a shoulder slightly and lowered her head so I couldn't see her face. I downed my drink and went to the bar and poured another.

She said to my back, 'You go off like a German land mine. Just one little touch!'

I returned to the love-nook, then stopped short. There were tears in her eyes. 'What's the matter now?' I said.

'Nothing.'

She kept her head bowed. I sat down beside her.

'What are you crying about?' I asked gently.

'I'm not crying. I'm just - happy!'

'You're happy?'

She moved over beside me and rested her head on my

shoulder. She whispered into my ear, 'Yes. Because I love you, too.'

I put my arm around her and she lifted up her face to mine.

And that was the sweetest kiss of all.

Then after a while she said, 'That's what I meant about coming up here with you. It is a final, decisive step. And I won't be able to turn back.'

'Do you want to turn back?' I asked her.

But she didn't answer me then. A long, long time later, she whispered, 'No, darling, I don't want to turn back, ever.'

The information from DICA arrived sometime after eleven o'clock by messenger. There were all the papers on the helicopter, which would be at a small airport outside of Marseilles Friday afternoon. There was a photo and a page of story on the pilot, who was described as an American expatriate and black-market money dealer whom I was supposed to have met in Paris months before. His name was Rufus Dickinson, known as Rube. He would be a DICA man, but that was not stated. There was another page on Sasha. He had driven me to Orly Airport and had seen me and Duchene board the London plane about the time Diane's train was getting in at the Gare de Lyon. There was a passport for Connie Chancellor with the French and British entry and exit stamps of Sunday, August 22. There was a love letter signed Belgrade which read: 'We continue our arrangement with great reluctance. As you so succinctly pointed out, we must "play along" with you, despite the fact that we consider your actions idiotic and dangerous. We notify you herewith that at the first opportunity, your services will be dispensed with.'

I called Mme Ballu's house and got her very quickly. Her voice was sharp, commanding. She was not thinking about numbers and astrology.

'Where are you?' she demanded.

'At my apartment, Mme Ballu. I just got in from London.'

'London, eh? Why aren't you over here? You know that I need you!'

'I'd prefer to see you in the morning.'

'You get over here now!' she screamed at me. 'You should have been here hours ago!'

I kissed Diane good-bye – it wasn't what you would have called a domestic kiss – and got a cab to the Avenue Foch. They were waiting for me, Mme Ballu, Adolph Lauderbach, the two mugs who had been escorting Diane on the train from Lyons and a tweedy, pipe-smoking gent in his late forties with a bland face and the look about him of a country squire with, say, a few million dollars to do it up right. He was introduced as Mr Hilary Zilbourg and I'd never heard of him, so maybe Dica hadn't either.

The meeting was in Mme Ballu's sitting room, up above her bath, a luxuriously furnished female den with pastel silks on the chairs, matching drapes, and tapestries on the walls. It was not the kind of room in which you'd expect to have to discuss the more serious aspects of self-preservation.

The atmosphere was generally one of anger, although it was largely suppressed. Mme Ballu said, 'There are many strange things that are going on, young man. We think that you will know about them.'

Zilbourg said, 'How is it that you can get gold for Gratz and Dorffman?'

'There's plenty of gold available in America,' I said. 'Frankie Vidal is one source. I've got others. It's a question of getting it over here. This gold I'm getting for Gratz on Wednesday arrives on a ship at Le Havre tonight or tomorrow. It will be delivered to Paris tomorrow evening by truck.'

'Where in Paris?'

'Duchene's garage on the Rue Lafayette. . . . Do you mind if I ask you, Mr Zilbourg, what business this is of yours?'

He turned his head to Mme Ballu, his eyebrows raised in a question. She told me severely, 'Mr Zilbourg has a right to know everything you do - that any of us do. I am responsible to him and so are you.'

'Good enough,' I said, 'I just like to know who I'm talking to.'

'You will ask no more questions,' said Lauderbach nastily. 'We will do the asking.'

They all glared at me. The two mugs moved uneasily by the door. I was sitting with my back to them, but I caught their uneasiness out of the corner of my eye.

'Duchene,' said Zilbourg. 'Have you known him long?'

'Yes,' I said. 'First ran into him when he was working for Frankie in Jersey. Back during the war.'

He nodded like a state's attorney, or a judge, and crossed his legs, leaning back in his chair. 'You know why Duchene left Mr Vidal?'

'No. Nobody ever told me that.'

'He was an informer,' said Zilbourg. 'He should have been killed, but he got away. . . . Now he shows up in Paris. We didn't know he was here. We're glad to find out. Also, we wonder why you are doing business with him.'

'I'll tell you why,' I said. 'I was asked to get a helicopter and Duchene got it for me. Today. If he was an informer back in America, what's that got to do with him now and with me?'

'We'll find out,' he said. 'It would appear that you have been close to other police personalities. This girl Deprez. Who are you working for, Chancellor, the police?'

'No, for Mme Ballu. Look, I've come up with a transportation plan for you that will work. I've gotten you a Boeing, that's out at Orly right now to bring your stuff from America. Today I got you a helicopter and it'll be

down at Marseilles Friday. I've delivered for you – everything you've asked. If you don't want me to work for you, say the word. I'll go back with Frankie in New York. I'm not getting anything out of this but a beating – by Gratz and then by your Pindar.'

He listened to me but he was not impressed. 'Do you know a man who calls himself General Delong?' he asked in a quiet voice.

So they *were* on to something! Did they also know about DICA and the D-Section operation? And if they'd gotten on to that, then maybe they knew about me, too! 'Yes,' I said, 'I have met Delong.'

'We know that. Tell us about him.'

'He was one of those who questioned me after I was shot. I assume he's some sort of police officer, but he didn't tell me what kind and I didn't ask. Then he made me an offer, if I'd work for him.'

He waited for me to go on. All of them were looking at me, and the animosity was thick enough to slice. I moved in my chair. I found no difficulty acting nervous.

I continued, 'He promised me ten thousand dollars, tax free, delivered in America, if I'd turn in Pindar and his crowd.'

One of the mugs stepped up in back of me and gave me a terrific smash on the side of the head.

Mme Ballu let out a small screech. 'No! No!' she cried. 'You'll get blood on my carpet!'

I shook my head and got to my feet. I didn't look at the mugs. I pointed a finger at Zilbourg. 'Get them out of here or you won't hear the rest of it,' I said. 'And don't make the mistake they did and jump to conclusions. You're all in a hell of a hole right now, and you need me a lot more than I need you. No matter what you think, I can still do a job for you, and I'm the *only* one who can.'

'Don't listen to him,' warned Lauderbach. 'He's—'

Zilbourg cut him off with a wave of the hand. 'I'll handle

this, Adolph,' he said. He nodded to the mugs. 'Get out,' he told them. 'Wait by the door.' Then he motioned me to sit down. 'What's the rest of it, Chancellor?'

I sat and got out a cigarette and lit it. My head felt numb and my neck hurt. 'The rest of it is this. I've never made any deal with Delong and his outfit and I never intended to. I wouldn't trust them any more than I'd trust any cops. . . . You think I'm going to change at this time of my life and go over to their side? Sure I strung him along - I'd meet him and talk to him and promise him anything, to keep him off my back. Anybody'd do the same. Now we get to this Judy Deprez. You think I didn't know she was working for Delong? I knew that and I was getting ready to dump her myself when Pindar stepped in, only he was so damned stupid, about it he nearly ruined everything. You know what he did? He and Brandeli walked out of her apartment leaving it a mess so that any dumb flatfoot would have known there'd been a fight there - that she'd been pushed out that window. *I* straightened it up. *I* made it look like a suicide. *I* cleaned up after them, and if I hadn't they would have rounded us all up. Those are the facts, and they don't make it look like I'm working for any cops. . . . Now you say Duchene is a stoolie. I say so what? He got me that helicopter, and any guy who can do that I can use. I've learned to use the people who are available, no matter who they are. You think I trust Duchene? I don't trust anybody but Chancellor, and if Duchene can get anything on me, he's welcome to it.'

'But you were, as a matter of fact, ready to sell out Pindar?'

'Sure I was - but to Gratz, not to the cops. Pindar's the one rodent I'm going to get myself one of these days. I owe him a lot.'

'What do you owe us - Mme Ballu and Mr Lauderbach and me?'

'Not any loyalty, if that's what you want. But I'm doing

a job for you, and I do my jobs good. You're going to pay me for what I do. You're going to pay me enough so that I won't have to fool around with Pindars and Gratzes and Dorffmans any more. That's what I have in mind. I'm for sale, too.'

He nodded at me again. 'What are you going to do about Delong?'

'Do about him? He'll be coming around from time to time and I'll keep him on the hook. . . . Maybe I can use him, too. Maybe he can get me a couple of cents a gallon off the gas for those planes.'

Mme Ballu thought it was funny and giggled. Neither Zilbourg nor Lauderbach cracked a muscle. Zilbourg said, 'We don't take foolish chances, Chancellor. This Delong is connected with some international crime organization. We've got a man who is going to find out about that very soon. Meanwhile, keep away from him. And keep away from Duchene.'

'Yes, sir,' I said.

He turned to Mme Ballu. 'What do you think, Isabella?' he asked.

She shook her head doubtfully. 'He's done what he said he could do, and that's something I haven't seen around here for a long time.'

He turned to Lauderbach. 'Adolph?' he asked.

The old man looked at me sourly. 'I'd like to know where he was today,' he said. 'We've still not cleared up that other matter.'

I took out my passport and handed it to Lauderbach. 'I said I was in London,' I told him. 'You'll find the exit and entry stamps there for France and England. That's something nobody's found out how to buy yet.'

He took the passport and thumbed through the pages to the last one stamped. He nodded over the page, then passed the book to Zilbourg. The latter closed it without looking at it and handed it back to me.

'We don't like this police business,' he told me. 'Our situation at this time is extremely critical. We want no police anywhere; we want no one checking on any of our actions. That goes particularly for Delong. If this man follows us when we go South, I want him killed.' He turned to Lauderbach. 'Let me know, Adolph, if there is any suspicious circumstance about this Franco-Iraq Oil transportation business – if there is any question whatsoever on the movement of these planes.'

He got up and shook Lauderbach's hand. Then he kissed Mme Ballu's and turned around to face me. 'You've done a good job – so far,' he said. 'Keep it up, Chancellor, and we'll take care of you.'

I shook his hand, which was unusually strong, and he left, piloted out by Lauderbach. Mme Ballu told me to sit down. She gave me a long, searching look with those penetrating eyes of hers.

'I'm going to take you into my confidence,' she said. 'I know that I shouldn't, since you say you were born at 8:30 in the evening – but everybody is so incompetent!' She sighed heavily and put her hand on her forehead, flashing her diamonds at me. 'Diane Gilbert is missing again! Somebody attacked those two men who brought her to Paris, right in the Gare de Lyon in broad daylight! Can you imagine that! She ran away – one of them saw her running – and now she has vanished! I tell you I can't understand it! I just can't make head or tail out of what is happening to that girl! . . . Our men – those two who were in here – were taken to the middle of the Bois de Boulogne in a car and were set free. Why should anyone do that? And now we can't find a trace of Diane. Connie, I want you to find out what is going on.'

'I'll try, Mme Ballu,' I said. 'Maybe she's having a love affair. That's what it sounds like to me – all this vanishing.'

'Nonsense!' Then her face hardened and her eyes glittered at me again. She was a dame with a lot of

intuition. 'You haven't been seeing her, have you?' she demanded.

I shook my head at her. 'You know I was in London today, Mme Ballu.'

'Don't you try to pull the wool over my eyes, you – you seven!'

XII

Monday morning came around later than usual, which could happen with someone like Diane Gilbert in your apartment. But there was little time for any of the things that should have been, even so, and I was out of there and poking around the Transportation Générale hangar at Orly Airport by ten o'clock. I should have been at the hangar Sunday when the Boeing arrived. Now the crew was gone off and the plane was locked up tighter than a Dublin pub on Sunday. The Transportation Générale people knew nothing. The Royal Franco-Iraq Oil people, whom I phoned, knew nothing. So I called the Invalides number and left a message.

'Get those Italians out to Orly immediately,' I said.

'Wait a minute, Geneva. You have a one-twenty at the Invalides—'

'The hell I have! Get that crew out here. I've no time for one-twenties. Tell 'em that.'

I banged the receiver on the hook to cut off any argument. I went down to the plane, leaned against the nose wheel, and lit a cigarette. It was possible that DICA wouldn't send the crew, and in that event I'd have to get Jean Perrel and Royal Franco busy right away. God knows what might have happened since the Boeing had arrived from England some twenty hours before that might have forced DICA to change plans. The one-twenty might have meant anything was brewing, or had brewed. What? But since no one

had come gunning for me, I had to assume I was still in business. What was important was that Mme Ballu had expressed a desire to see the plane and was at that moment on her way out to the airport. First things first. I'd show her our air transport and satisfy her, then get back to DICA.

The next car to arrive at the hangar was Mme Ballu's Rolls. Isabella and Lewison of Royal Franco got out and stood looking up at the nose of the plane. I walked over to them.

'It's awfully big,' said Mme Ballu. 'Much bigger than I pictured it.'

'We need all of that size for the cargo,' I said. 'The important thing for us in this operation is maximum range, so we will not be forced to set down in an unfriendly area if we run into bad weather. That's a long hop from New Jersey to Marseilles and we're going to need plenty of gas.'

'Can I see the inside?' she asked.

'We're waiting for the crew now. They'll take us through the plane.'

'What time will you take off?' asked Lewison.

'Depends on the weather. We hope right after dark, which would land us in New Jersey in the early morning.'

We inspected the outside of the plane from all angles. Mme Ballu was pleased. There was some idea in that devious mind of hers, for she asked me a lot of questions that were unrelated to the hauling of cargo, from the number of washrooms aboard to the effects of various altitudes upon one's ears. Then she said, 'I wish we could delay the take off. I want Hilary to see it.'

'I wouldn't advise delaying beyond tonight,' I said.

I saw Sasha, out of the corner of my eye, coming down the steps on the outside of the hangar that led to the Transportation Générale offices. He came towards us, walking fast, but trying to hide his urgency. He stopped by my side.

. 'Excuse, Mr Chancellor,' he said with his atrocious accent, 'but there is telephone. Up in office.'

'That's about our crew,' I said to Mme Ballu. 'I'll be right back.'

I strode off and Sasha came running by my side. When we got out of earshot of the others he said, 'Call Klèber. Whole deal has blown up. Oh, my! We're in the soup!'

I ran up the stairs and into the hangar manager's office where there was a phone. The manager was out and his secretary arranged a chair for me, then left. I dialled Klèber. A woman answered.

'Geneva,' I said.

'Hold on. Here's a recording.' I waited a moment, then there was Burleigh's precise voice dictating: 'All DICA and plane transfer compromised. Our key man in London in aeroplane deal has sold out. He has written report to someone called "Z" detailing DICA operation and identity of Geneva as DICA man. Entire overseas mail being held up, but we don't know who "Z" is so we have not much hope there. Informer now en route Orly in private transport zero six eight BG nine five and he will go to Transportation Générale hangar, since he was told by telephone that Mrs Ballu and Geneva would be there. Due about eleven-thirty hours. Get Mrs Ballu away so we can get to hangar and intercept him. Belgrade.'

'Give me Belgrade,' I said.

I looked at my watch. Eleven-fifteen. Burleigh's voice came on.

'"Z" is Hilary Zilbourg,' I said.

'No!' he exclaimed. 'That couldn't be!'

'It is. I've met him.'

'My God, man, Hilary Zilbourg is one of the most prominent private bankers of Europe! Heads up Couzin Frères. . . . But wait a moment! That's where we got Martinson! Well, I'm damned!'

'Who's Martinson?'

'The London man. Well! Then maybe we can pull it out of the fire. We'll know what to look for now in that overseas mail. You'll need another crew. We can't trust the Italians. Can you get rid of Mme Ballu?'

'Haven't time. I'll handle Martinson.'

'You can't, Geneva. That boy's tough.'

'I'll have to. Keep DICA away. Good-bye.'

I went back down and found Mme Ballu sitting in the Rolls, with Lewison standing beside the open door talking to her.

'We've got bad news,' I said. 'My crew was picked up in Paris with improper papers, after a row in a night club. We'll have to get one of the Royal Franco-Iraq crews for the flight.'

'That can be arranged,' Lewison said. 'Perrel will see to it.'

'Then we'd better have it done right away,' I said. 'They'll need check flights before they take off, and those will take them the rest of the day.'

'I want to see the interior of the plane,' said Mme Ballu.

'I'll arrange that immediately,' I said.

I found the hangar manager and got him to give me a crew to haul steps to the side of the Boeing and open it up. I asked the manager to conduct Mme Ballu through the plane and explain its details to her. I got her started up the steps. I persuaded Lewison to go to the manager's office and phone Perrel. I went back to the Rolls and I got in. I told Sasha, 'A small transport plane should be in here pretty quick. It'll park somewhere along this apron. When it starts to slow down, head for it. Go like a bat out of hell. Get alongside the door the minute it stops. You understand that?'

He nodded. 'Yes,' he said.

I sat back on the cushions and lit a cigarette. There was no point in jittering. This Martinson either would come or he wouldn't. He would bring his plane here, or to some

other hangar. If not here, then it was DICA's headache. Mme Ballu was good for a half hour in the Boeing, with her sudden new interest in aviation, and Lewison would have a lot of talking to do to Perrel so that he could prove his importance.

'Isn't that a plane coming this way?' asked Sasha.

I looked ahead through the windshield, following his pointing finger, and saw a low-wing job taxiing towards us. The twin props flashed as they caught the sunlight and the wings rocked as the wheels bounced over the uneven terrain at this end of the field. 'Get over to the left so you can circle around and come up on the left wing,' I told Sasha.

He started the Rolls and sped to the far end of the apron. The plane was within a couple of hundred yards and moving slowly. As it got closer, I could see that its chief characteristics were smearing oil and peeling paint. It was one of the most unkempt aircraft I'd ever seen. But it had the right numbers on it - 068BC95.

Sasha took off on an interception course as the plane swung around towards the centre of the apron. He reached the plane's tail while it still had twenty-five yards to go, and he was in position on the port side ready to move into the door as it slowed at the edge of the apron. Then the plane stopped and we were along side in a flash, with tires squealing as Sasha braked hard to keep from crashing the edge of the wing. I had the door open and I was out. I swung on to the roof of the Rolls and that brought me even with the plane's door. I had my hand on the latch to open it when the handle turned and the door was rolled back along the fuselage. A heavily built, football linesman type with a lush Guards' moustache was standing in the doorway looking at me out of small, pale blue eyes.

'Martinson?' I asked.

He nodded. 'Who are you?' he demanded.

'I've got an important message for you from Mr Zilbourg,' I said. 'You'll have to take off again right away.' I made it sound urgent. I stepped to the plane's doorway, still talking. 'A hell of a situation has just come up here,' I said. 'We're all moving out of Paris within the next few hours.' I was inside the plane. He had moved away from the door and was standing looking at me with a cynical expression. Something didn't add up.

I leaned against the back of the seat, with the canvas cover worn through and dirty foam-rubber showing, and took a quick look around. The inside of the craft matched the outside. A wood flooring was in splinters and was caked with grease and dirt. There was a suffocating odour of gasoline and up ahead of the single passenger seat were stacked several score of five-gallon *bidons*, most of them wet on the outside. There were all kinds of odds and ends lying about – a parachute pack, a box of signal flares and a Very pistol on the seat, a small uninflated rubber boat, coils of rope, and a stack of old newspapers.

'How did Mr Zilbourg know I was coming here?' he asked.

'That phone call to Mme Ballu. I was out at the house. He called and I told him.'

He nodded at me. He backed up against the plane's door and rolled it shut. Then he said, cheerfully enough, 'You're a damned liar. Zilbourg is on his way to Biarritz and he won't get there for another hour.' Then suddenly he had a gun on me, one of those efficient British military models of blue steel. 'Who are you?'

'Chancellor,' I said.

'I thought so. Something told me. . . . Well, Chancellor, let's get it over with, shall we?'

He had moved close to me. He put the gun against my ribs and, I presume, he was tightening his finger on the trigger. It is the kind of movement that an amateur with firearms will often make. He will move towards his target

instead of away from it. I'd had a full course in that from DICA. So I went into action, fast and wide, at just the right instant, and the shot grazed my stomach. I had hold of the gun by then, getting a bad powder burn on my hand, and I wrenched it out of his hand, breaking at least one finger.

But if he didn't know about firearms, he knew about rough and tumble. He was on me in an instant, with an arm around my neck and pressing against my windpipe. There was no question that I'd picked on the wrong boy to wrestle with. But I got the gun around in back of me and pulled the trigger. I don't know where the shot went. I lost the gun, but also the pressure on my windpipe eased off considerably. Then I heaved him over my shoulder and he landed across the seat. The gun was in his hand. I dived for it. Then I smelled something unmistakable. Fire. Gasoline fire. I got the gun and rolled to the floor. A hot blast of flames and smoke enveloped me and I scrambled on all fours for the door. The smoke was so thick I could see nothing. I felt frantically for the handle and latch. I found them and rolled the door back, holding my breath until I felt my lungs were going to burst. The instant the door opened, the smoke and flames shot out of the plane, and me with them. Hands grabbed me and eased me to the ground. Then we ran, two others and myself. One was Sasha, and he led me to the Rolls, opened the door, and pushed me into the back seat. There was suddenly the high, undulating whine of fire sirens in the distance.

Sasha drove a short way, then stopped. I looked over my clothes and found them in a mess. My coat and shirt were torn across my stomach where the bullet had passed, and plenty of blood had soaked into the ragged edges from the groove in my flesh. My trousers were torn at one knee. My right hand was black and blistering from the powder burn. I felt the gun in my pants pocket, but I didn't remember putting it there.

Mme Ballu came hurrying up to the car from the Boeing and Sasha opened the door for her. She looked at me and drew in her breath sharply, then climbed in beside me. Lewison appeared from somewhere and got in front with Sasha. We took off immediately, driving fast.

‘What happened?’ Mme Ballu asked.

I told her, loud enough so that Sasha could hear and corroborate my story, if necessary – so that he could inform DICA if I didn’t get the chance. Lewison had opened the window to the front compartment and was turned around so that he could hear, too.

‘That plane that came in,’ I said, ‘I thought it might have been Magnus Hansen. He’s the one who got me the Boeing and he’s due over here from London. Sasha drove me alongside. There was a man in the plane I’d never seen before. He asked me where he could find you – Mme Ballu. I told him you were inspecting the Boeing – that I was with you. He invited me to come aboard, said he wanted to show me something. I climbed up from the top of the car. He pulled a gun on me and told me this was the end of the line for me and for you. He acted as though he had gone crazy. He was raving about something he called Dica or Pica – it sounded like that. I finally jumped him. He shot at me and I got the gun away and shot at him. One of the shots must have started the fire. I got out. I guess he’s still there.’

‘I don’t like this,’ she said. ‘I can make no sense out of it. There are too many of these incidents lately – strange things going on that we know nothing about. – Are you hurt? What’s that on your stomach, blood?’

‘I got grooved by his shot. I’d better get back to my apartment. The police will want to ask some questions about this.’

‘You keep away from the police,’ she said. ‘I’ll have it arranged that they won’t look for you or bother you. I think you’d better come home with me.’

‘No, I’d better go to my place. I’ve got a lot of work to do – I may be up all night getting that flight started. I’ll have to see the crew and give them instructions, then I’ll have to contact our people in America.’

‘You need someone to take care of you,’ she insisted.

‘I’ve got a girl up in my apartment,’ I said.

She smiled at me. She was an evil old dame and she liked the thought of that. ‘Well,’ she said, ‘you are a sly one! Who is she, Connie?’

‘Oh, you wouldn’t know her,’ I said. ‘But you may meet her – some day. I think you might like her, at that.’

The uncovering of the international banker Hilary Zilbourg as one of the master minds of the underworld meant nothing to me. He was just another of that growing company of the lawless who would destroy anyone and anything for personal gain, and my own opinion has been for years that few businessmen wouldn’t do the same if given the opportunity. There is too little morality in business – and the only thing that has prevented it from ruining itself through its own greed is the sometimes efficient operation of the legal code. Never has it been human conscience or a moral sense, because these men have neither. And if you want to interpret this as an attack upon free enterprise, you’re welcome. But don’t make the mistake, either, of putting any popular label on this thinking. It does not follow that the immorality of individuals under a democracy promotes acceptance of the moral standards in another system of politics and economics. All communism has done, for instance, is to substitute state immorality for that of the individual – to increase this godlessness a million-fold – to organize it and to use it as an instrument of internal and international policy. That is hardly an improvement.

So Zilbourg was a godless individualist, and the world is full of them. The fact that he had a higher potential for

evil than his fellow immoralists was academic. But this objective, analytical view was not that taken by DICA. The D-Section reaction was immediate and dramatic. It was to attempt to force this entire operation to an instant conclusion at any cost, at any sacrifice. It was to order me to get out and away, so that they could come in blazing and smashing, so that they could put a final end to the leaders and the apparatus of this great peril to the system they defended.

It was one way to do it. Smash it now. Smash all of the people who are a part of it. . . . But there's the rub. You must smash them *all*. You must root them out to the last one, or you are merely delaying the spread of this cancer, you are arresting it only temporarily. For if there is one cell left, then it will take root and grow, so that you will have it all to do over again.

I had a one-twenty meeting at the Invalides on Tuesday morning. Diane had patched me up after the Orly set to and had, at the same time, expressed strong convictions about my activities. I'd had a lot of trouble with her that night because I'd had to go out again against her express orders so that I could make the final arrangements for the Boeing. The plane had finally taken off at midnight headed for the Teterboro Airport in New Jersey, and when I had gotten back from Orly at a quarter to one she had read me the last, final ultimatum. 'Either you stay here and get well or I will leave you - forever,' she had said. And I had said - well, it doesn't make any difference what I had told her. At nine o'clock in the morning there was the call for the one-twenty and at ten I was walking through the Invalides Museum with Burleigh and Franklin and van der Heide. We were in the hall that houses the battle-flags and the souvenirs of Napoleon's campaigns through Europe and Asia and Africa, and only a handful of early-rising tourists were about the buildings. We had fair privacy; when the others came close Burleigh would

immediately launch into a discourse on Napoleon, about whom he appeared to know a great deal.

'Your work is finished,' said Franklin, opening the meeting. 'We now have all the facts we need. We will get you out of France and out of Europe within the next few hours. Inside of a week you will be back aboard a ship of your own in an American port.'

'How do you figure that?' I asked.

'Zilbourg is the key man,' said Burleigh. 'We've raked through Couzin Frères and through his other connections from top to bottom and we have the complete answer. We will be ready to make our final move within hours.'

'Would you mind telling me more? I am naturally interested.'

'Not at all,' he replied. 'We find that Couzin Frères and Hilary Zilbourg, in association with several other companies he controls, have been negotiating a loan for some two billions of dollars to the government of Madura. We find that this huge credit is to be established through the deposit in the Maduran treasury of dollars, English pounds and Swiss francs. We find furthermore that there is no issue of bonds being contemplated for this sum – a most unusual circumstance. So that means, then, that we know the source of this money and how it was intended to distribute the counterfeit. Now we have also the answer to the final riddle – how this group was going to use the wealth produced by their printing presses. They are going to use it to purchase the Republic of Madura for two billions of dollars. And that is where they will go, to live as royalty beyond all of the laws of the world.'

'Zilbourg and who else?' I asked.

'Mme Ballu, Lauderbach – perhaps one or two others of lesser light.'

'How do I get disposed of, for their benefit?'

'You get killed by us,' said Franklin. 'We still have the original Chancellor's body, nicely preserved. We

produce it; it is identified. That's the end of Connie Chancellor.'

'At the battlefield of Marengo,' said Burleigh, 'no water was obtainable – not enough to boil an egg – and Napoleon's camp was completely dry. All they had was wine, which was sufficient for drinking but which left the general's chef with a dilemma. But he was a resourceful man and so he cooked that night's dinner of freshly-killed veal in the wine instead of water. Hence *Veau Marengo*.'

I looked around and a tall, thin Englishwoman and her two teen-aged children were standing beside Burleigh and listening with fascinated attention. Burleigh bowed to them and we four moved off down the hall.

'What's going to happen when they find out there were two Connie Chancellors and only one body?' I asked.

'By the time they find out – if they do – it won't make any difference. We'll have them all safely put away.'

'And Diane Gilbert? What protection will you give her?'

'No protection. She'll be in no danger.'

'You're willing to stake her life and mine, too, on your belief that when you get Zilbourg and Lauderbach and Mme Ballu, you'll have them all? I'll tell you what's going to happen. You'll get those three and you'll lock 'em away. Couzin Frères will collapse and the Madura loan will collapse and there'll be a hell of a scandal, like that Stavisky affair back in the Thirties. And inside of a month you'll have it all to do over again. You'll have the same counterfeited money plot on the same tremendous scale. The only thing different will be that you'll have a new group operating, and you won't know anything about them. You won't have any Connie Chancellor, either. No matter what you think of me, don't forget I've given you Mme Ballu and Royal Franco-Iraq Oil and Hilary Zilbourg, and without them you'd be right back where you were two weeks ago.'

We stopped at the end of the hall and waited until two

young couples had passed by us. Burleigh took my arm. He said, 'Zilbourg is the top man, unless you know something more than you've told us.'

'I've told you very little,' I said. 'I've given you a few pieces of specific information as I've found them, but they are not the whole story. I've gotten no more than a hint of it here and there, but I can tell you for certain that if you act now on what you know, you'll be cutting your own throats. And mine and Diane's. Gratz will be around to talk. They'll get Diane and they'll make her talk, and she'll wind up like Judy, dead on a Paris sidewalk. That's the sum total of what you'll achieve going off half-cocked on Hilary Zilbourg.'

We started walking again. Burleigh had one arm, Franklin the other, and van der Heide brought up the rear. 'We've gone far enough,' insisted Franklin. 'In police work, there is a critical moment when one must act. Naturally you have the fears and the illusions of any amateur in such a situation. You let us handle it and there'll be no danger to you or Miss Gilbert.'

'You handled Judy Deprez,' I reminded him. 'No, I'm going to be stubborn. I'm going to insist that you let me continue.'

'You're not on a crusade, are you Chancellor?' asked Burleigh. We stopped at the upper end of the hall and formed a tight group.

'Maybe I am, but I'll tell you this. I'm not getting out of France now and I am not going to turn Diane over to you or to anybody else. . . . I'll give you one more fact. This whole scheme was hatched by no international banker. Somewhere up at the top of this conspiracy is a man or a group who have very specific and perfect knowledge of counterfeiting - of all its techniques. Van der Heide will back me up in this, I am certain. He knows what knowledge would be necessary to manufacture this money.'

The Dutchman nodded his head in agreement. 'The boy

is right,' he said. 'I had not thought of it before, but there must be such a man who is directing this plot. Zilbourg is necessary, yes. Without him, there would be no distribution. And Mme Ballu and her brother, they are the ones who supply the working staff – the office managers. But up at the top is the genius who conceived it all and who manufactures these billions of wealth.'

'Zilbourg could be that man,' said Burleigh. 'The workmanship can be hired. In the underworld it is always available.'

'I don't agree with you,' I said. 'And I'm not going to stake my life on any theory that's as thin as *bistro* soup.'

'Damn it!' exploded Franklin, 'we're not going to—'

'Wait a minute,' interrupted van der Heide; 'Chancellor is absolutely right. Why don't you listen to him? Why don't you give him a chance to prove his point?'

Well, you never know where you're going to find friends. Van der Heide is the last one I would have expected to support me.

'We should not abandon our plans unless Chancellor produces something more specific than his personal fears,' said Burleigh. He turned to me, 'All right, we will delay our activities for a few days and we will permit you to continue for that time. We will let you know when we decide to act. When that time comes, you will get out of our way or you will suffer the consequences.'

'Good enough,' I said. 'Now how about that gold for Gratz? Where and when do I pick it up?'

XIII

The gold was in a small delivery truck with an unmarked aluminium body parked on the Champs Elysées just above the Rue Washington. There was a gendarme lounging

near it, and when I came along he stopped me and told me that I had parked too long and that I would have to pay a fine of 650 francs. I asked him if he could change a 10,000 franc note and he said he couldn't. I asked him if he'd take a pack of American cigarettes. He said he would, then he gave me the key to the truck. I offered him the cigarettes anyway but he declined them. He told me he could get all he wanted. Everyone could who worked at DICA headquarters. I drove the truck down the Champs Elysées, across the Pont de la Concorde, and up the Boulevard St Germain to the Rue du Bac. I parked near the entrance to the Sicilione, locked the truck, and took the elevator to the top floor, after announcing myself in the lobby. I was admitted to Pindar's apartment by the butler and shown out to the terrace, where Pindar was occupied with his binoculars. He turned and gave me an unfriendly nod, then resumed his window peeking. I went up to him and tapped him on the shoulder.

'I haven't got any time to waste,' I said. 'You'll have to listen to me now or you miss out on a good thing.'

He lowered the binoculars and gave me a scowl. 'What favours are you doing for me?' he demanded.

'No favours,' I said. 'I wouldn't be up here if I didn't need your help. But you can get paid off. I've got 14,000 ounces of gold I'm delivering to Gratz. I don't trust him. I want protection.'

'From me? You won't get it.'

'O.K., Pindar. Then you don't get the gold.'

I turned away from him and started off. He yelled at me. 'Wait a minute, Chancellor! What do you mean I get the gold?'

'Get smart,' I said. 'If your boys know where it is, then you can get it, can't you?'

He scowled some more. He put his binoculars on a table and came over to me. 'What's the gimmick, Chancellor? You double-crossing again?'

'Hell, I don't care who gets it. I deliver it, that's all. You want to wreck Gratz, here's your chance. Knock him off, take the gold, and you'll have no more problems. Also you get even for Brandeli. You know what he'll do with that gold when he gets it, don't you?'

'All right,' he said, 'how many men do you want?'

'Two. With Schmeiser guns.'

'When?'

'Now.'

'I'll phone down.'

I followed him into the study and he phoned. He asked for room 73, then gave his orders. He hung up the phone and turned to me. 'They'll be in the lobby in five minutes,' he said. Then he chewed on his thick lower lip for a moment. 'I don't get it,' he said. 'Why are you doing it this way?'

'Because of Dorffman,' I said. 'I could deal with Gratz alone, but not with Dorffman there. I'm just looking out for Chancellor's neck, that's all.'

He laughed, spitting his saliva in my face. 'I heard about that!' he said. 'You kidnapped him!'

I wiped my face with my handkerchief and shrugged at him. 'You hear all kinds of things,' I said.

His face got serious, ugly. 'You pull anything on me,' he said, 'and it'll take more than Lauderbach to hide you.'

'We'll talk about you and me one of these days,' I told him.

I walked out and took the elevator to the lobby. The two torpedoes were waiting there - Lupe and his taller twin who had sapped me with the blackjack the night Pindar had given me the going over. His name was Dino, Lupe told me. They were both carrying paper-wrapped packages which would be the Schmeiser guns. We walked out to the truck after the brief introduction and I unlocked it and we three crowded into the seat. I drove out the Rue Vaugirard and over to the Rue St Charles, in the far

reaches of the Fifteenth Arrondissement. Somewhere along the way we picked up company, a black Simca that stayed with us as though tied to a towrope. I tried a few fancy twists and turns down unexpected streets out near the end of the Rue Vaugirard but I couldn't lose him. Both Lupe and Dino got on to the other car very quickly. They unwrapped their Schmeiser guns and held them out of sight but ready. They didn't seem to be perturbed, so the following car might have been Pindar's. But then again, it might not have been. I was certain it wasn't a DICA car – they never would have trailed me in that manner – but I couldn't see how it could have been Gratz and Dorffman either, unless they had followed me all the way from my own apartment to the Champs Elysées and thence to the Sicilione. But why not?

Anyway, I was happy to have even such as Lupe and Dino with me. We arrived at the address on the Rue St Charles given to me by Gratz at about five minutes to twelve, which was five minutes ahead of the time I'd said I would be there, so I drove on by it and down to the next street. I drew over to the curb at the corner and the Simca followed suit, a couple of car-lengths behind. I waited about four minutes, then started suddenly, made a U-turn, and got back to Gratz's address. There was a huge double-door leading into a courtyard and this was open. It had been closed the first time I passed. I drove through and braked to a halt in the centre of the yard, facing a garage. I'd caught a glimpse of the Simca making the U-turn as I'd swung into the driveway. As I came to a stop, it, too, entered the courtyard, stopping just inside the door. Two men got out, one on each side. They stood by the car, looking in our direction.

Three men came out of the garage towards us. One of them was the little Fritz who had visited me in my apartment with Gratz the first time I'd met him. The second was one of those who had been with Gratz on the next

visit to my apartment. The third was Gratz himself, walking just a little bit ahead of his companions, his old blood-hound face with a questioning look on it thrust forwards towards our truck.

I opened the door on my side and got out. I told Lupe and Dino, 'Stay here. Don't start anything unless they do.'

I walked up to Gratz and he stopped.

'It's in the truck,' I said. 'Where do you want it?'

'You do not greet me as a friend?' he asked sadly.

'No,' I said. 'You're no friend of mine. Where do you want your gold?'

'Who are those men with you?' he asked.

'They are Pindar's men,' I replied.

I'd backed away from him a couple of steps and turned so I could see the men behind us by the courtyard entrance. They were standing together by the open door of the car and one of them had his hand inside. Maybe he was holding a gun.

'Why do you bring Pindar's men here?' Gratz demanded angrily.

'Because I don't trust you and Dorffman,' I said.

Gratz suddenly raised his right hand straight up over his head. It was a completely illogical thing for him to do. It was the kind of gesture that had no relationship to conversation or human intercourse. It could have been only one thing. A signal.

But I didn't stand there looking at him with his hand raised, wondering what he was doing. In fact, I didn't wait for him to get his hand all the way up. I dived for his legs in a football tackle and carried him to the ground with me. And as I hit, there was the sharp crack of a shot from somewhere up above and something stung me on my left leg, like the bite of an angry wasp. I rolled with Gratz and I could almost hear his old bones rattle. Then as I moved to spring up and away, the general shooting started. One of the men in the truck - Dino or Lupe -

had opened up through the windshield. Fritz was on the ground near Gratz, thrashing and jerking. His companion was legging it across the courtyard towards the garage, a pistol in his hand. The two by the Simca were both firing at the truck, one with a Sten gun and the other with an automatic.

There was a U.S. Army Colt .45 on the cobblestones beside Fritz and I grabbed it up as I scrambled in that direction. I had to keep moving fast. There was someone up above, probably with a rifle, who was after no one but me.

The nearest cover was a building to the right of the garage that I had noticed when we had come into the courtyard. It looked as though it contained apartments, but all the windows except one at the top were closed off with steel shutters. There were double glass doors leading in from the yard and they appeared to be unlocked. There were two shots close to my feet that kicked up dust from the cobbles as I legged it twenty feet to the doors. I hit them at full speed and they swung back with a crash as their glass shattered. I stopped in the lobby up against a stair railing and took a fast look out to the courtyard. Gratz was lying still. Fritz was lying still. The third of this trio had fallen just at the entrance to the garage. One of the men who had been by the Simca was on the ground. The other was walking towards the truck, his hands in the air. Lupe was out of the truck, standing by the open door covering the man approaching. Dino had started the truck and was just putting it in gear. Maybe they'd get away, if they could move the Simca and get out of the courtyard before the police arrived. But probably not. If they'd abandoned the truck and had run for it, they could have made it easily. Why didn't they? I don't know. I started up the stairs.

I ran to the top floor, then stopped there to rest for a moment. My left leg was stinging and had begun to stiffen.

It was too dark to see anything, with the window there shuttered. I felt around my calf. It was sticky with blood. I tied my handkerchief around it, then started hunting for a way out. There was no stairway or other access to the roof. But there was a door leading somewhere just at the top of the stairway and it was not locked. I opened it slowly and looked into more darkness. But there was a faint line of light just ahead of me on the floor and I moved towards it. I felt a door. I opened it and looked down a hallway to an unshuttered window facing the courtyard. This, I supposed, was the window I had seen from the outside. I walked quietly along the hall and into an unfurnished room. Half of the window was open and I glanced out and down to the courtyard. The truck and the Simca were stalled in the passage. A half dozen blue-coated gendarmes were coming through from the street on the run.

I felt something under my foot. I picked it up. It was an 8 mm. brass shell-case. There were three others there on the floor. I went back down the hall and opened a door on the left that led to another empty room. The window there, facing the side of the building, was also unshuttered and open. It looked out onto the roof. I climbed out and looked around, keeping low and with my .45 ready. There was no one in sight – just an empty vista of chimney pots and parapets. There were too many parapets; too many places to hide. It was no good. But I couldn't go back down with that rifleman still on the loose. If he didn't get me now, he'd get me later, and under conditions that he could arrange to suit himself so that next time he wouldn't miss. That would be the way he'd do it – Willy Dorffman.

I moved across two parapets, keeping as low as possible and making no noise. The day had started out overcast and threatening; now suddenly the sun burst through and lighted up the rooftops of Paris. I sat down against a wall and took a good look at my leg. The bleeding had stopped and the pain had subsided. It didn't look serious. I climbed

over that wall and just as I reached the top I caught a glimpse of something moving up ahead – a quick flash of what might have been the top of a person's head. So now I knew about where he was.

I explored the slope of the roof I was on to see if there was a convenient window I could get through. First I had to find a way of retreat if I was going to attempt to lure Willy. But there was none. A good acrobat could have made three or four of the windows, but I wasn't any sort of acrobat with my wounded left leg.

I had to try the next roof. I went over the parapet in a dive, taking no more chances on the slower climb. For if I'd seen Dorffman, then probably he'd seen me. But the dive was a mistake. It started my leg bleeding and acting up again, and I had to sit down and try to repair the damage. I got the blood stopped and tied a fair bandage with a second handkerchief, then started crawling around to inspect the roof. I was lucky. There was a trap-door in a triangular abutment that obviously led to a stairway. It was locked, but it was such a spring-lock that I was able to open it with my penknife. I jimmied the lock, opened the door, then crawled back to the parapet.

It was a matter of waiting. How patient was Dorffman? I remembered that the Germans had a reputation for infinite patience. I remembered that they often made excellent hunters, just as they made excellent soldiers. Yes, they could wait. But could this one German wait as long as the man who called himself Connie Chancellor, who had so much at stake? Could he control himself as well as I could? Was he as determined as I was? That's what I had to gamble on. That's what might give me the edge.

It was about 12:30 when I started the vigil. The sun was shining – a beautiful Paris day, for a change. It was quite warm, but not uncomfortably so. I lit a cigarette and blew the smoke upwards, so that if Dorffman was

peeking, it could place me exactly. I stretched out as comfortably as I could, keeping the .45 in my right hand. I thought about all of the strange and violent things that had happened in this short ten or eleven days since I had encountered the *maquereau* on the Canebière who had asked me why I hadn't let him know I was there. That was the beginning of it. Then there was Hannakin and the box of five-pfund notes and the blonde *poule* and the gambling house and arrest. Then Paris and DICA. D-Section and Judy Deprez and Connie Chancellor. What had there been there? Had Judy actually been in love with that double-crossing hoodlum, or had she merely been doing a job? And when I came along, had she transferred this affection, if it had existed, to me, but fought against it successfully so that she wouldn't make the same mistake twice? That's the way it seemed to me. She fought me and she fought herself, and she was winning that battle when the vicious Pindar threw her to her death on the Quai d'Orleans.

Now Judy was gone and there was Diane. I should have taken care of Judy. I should have guarded her life for her, as I could have done. But I didn't know, then. It had not seemed possible that an organization so powerful and efficient as DICA could be so careless. But that wouldn't happen with Diane, if I had to fight the entire International Criminal Investigation Authority myself, single handed. And now, right now, we were getting down to the payoff. One part of the payoff. Gratz. He'd be out of the way. Either he was dead, down in that courtyard, or he'd be put safely away in jail. DICA would have to see, if he was still alive, that he talked to no one - that he did not communicate his suspicions about Connie Chancellor. So Gratz would be out of the way for these few remaining days. Now, just across a couple of parapets, was Willy Dorffman. He would know, too. Gratz would have told him. He would know about Connie Chancellor and about

Diaphe Gilbert, and all it would need would be a word from him and there would be no remaining days at all.

Dorffman wanted to kill me himself and that made it better. That would make it work out very nicely. He would try. I had to give him that chance or I would never get him myself. So let him try. . . . Perhaps I wasn't thinking too clearly. Perhaps I'd formed an exaggerated opinion of my invulnerability. Perhaps I'd gotten over-confident because I was still alive and so many others weren't — Chancellor and Judy and Brandeli and Martinson and those down in the courtyard, however many. Well, but you've got to have confidence. . . .

The sun set in coppery glory and I counted the cigarette butts beside my left hand. Eight. I had five more left. I'd have to stretch them for many hours, if all those observers were right about the Germans.

Darkness came and it grew colder. I moved around a bit, exercising my left leg which was growing stiff again. I took a very cautious peek over the parapet, from the side of a chimney, but there was nothing. No sign of Dorffman. I lit another cigarette. Two left. I started thinking about Diane and of what it might be, if—. Those were pleasant thoughts and a lot more time passed. I exercised again, then took a look from behind the chimney. There was a half of a moon that gave little enough light, but it was enough to see if a person was moving about on any of the nearby roofs. There was a movement up ahead, a dark shadow that seemed to be flowing slowly over a parapet fifty yards away. I watched it for several minutes, then suddenly the shadow disappeared. My ear caught a faint sound, as of a shoe scraping against a slate. That was all. Silence and no more shadows. I sat back down. It wouldn't be long now. He was becoming impatient. He was unable to wait any longer. He'd lost the first round.

A lot more time passed. No more sounds. No movements. I lit my last cigarette and looked at my watch by the light

of the match. Eleven-thirty. I crawled cautiously to the triangular abutment that housed the door and the stairway and lay down behind it. I finished my cigarette and put it out, then concentrated on listening. I listened so intently, driving all thoughts from my mind, that I seemed to have mesmerized myself. I had a feeling of being disembodied, of drifting through space in a world without physical sensation. I could no longer feel my body and there was no consciousness of having life and performing its functions. Then a sound came to my ears, a light tap and a scrape, and instantly I had resumed full awareness of the here and the now and of myself. I felt a pain in my wounded leg and one elbow I was resting on cried out against its cramped position. But I didn't move it. I listened. Another tap. Two quick scrapes. I located the direction from which they came. It seemed to be from where I had been sitting. I peeked around the abutment, moving only my head and shoulders, and I saw Willy Dorffman.

He was crouched by the parapet, not a dozen feet from me, his rifle pointed right at my eyes. Could he see me? Had he seen me? I ducked my head back with a lightning reflex motion. There was no shot. I brought the .45 around slowly to get it into position. I clicked off the safety. It made the faintest sound, barely audible to my own ears. There was suddenly a scraping sound to my left. I turned my head quickly and there was Dorffman, just beside me, moving by the abutment. He saw me the instant I saw him. I was bringing the .45 around for a shot when he jumped me, landing on my back with all his 220 pounds.

I kept the gun but I couldn't use it. He got a stranglehold around my neck with one arm and pinned my gunhand down with the other. I let the gun go and gave a tremendous heave, throwing him over on his back, with me on top of him. That got both my arms free, but failed to break the stranglehold. Well, there are a couple of

ways to break that and I used the one that is barred from the wrestling mats. I broke the hold and I hurt him. He grunted with pain and fury and for a moment we were apart. He was on his knees, doubled over in his agony, and I was getting to my feet. Suddenly he sprang up and at me and let go a haymaker that caught me high on the jaw. I staggered back and he was on top of me again with that same strangle-hold. Maybe it was the only hold he knew. I broke it the second time, with much less finesse even than I had used before. He went down and started rolling down the steep, slated side of the roof. Then I saw that I was at the very edge, and that I, too, was in danger of going over. I went flat and grabbed the edge. I caught a glimpse of Dorffman's arms and legs flying through space as he gathered momentum. Then he disappeared. A moment later there came a great thump from below as his body hit the ground.

I scrambled back to the flat and found his rifle and my .45. I put the pistol in my pocket and tossed his rifle over the roof where his body had disappeared. I didn't wait to hear it fall. I was through the door, which I locked after myself, and on my way down the stairs.

I was in the hallway of a tenement building. The light was on and an aged dame with her hair in curlers and a soiled pink dressing-gown wrapped around her lumpy figure was standing in an open doorway and regarding me belligerently. I realized that Willy and I had been making a lot of noise up on that roof and that we had disturbed her. I said politely, '*Bonsoir, madame.*'

She spat some street idiom at me that I didn't understand – nothing but the word *sale* – and banged the door in my face. I hurried on down the five flights to the ground floor, then stood by the front doors, which were of glass and looked out on a courtyard. There was a gendarme there, talking to the *conciérge* near her lodge. There were two people looking up towards the roof.

'A door opened behind me, down the hall, and a man came out. He turned and kissed a girl good-bye, then came towards me. She stood looking after him, a smile on her face. She was, maybe twenty-three or twenty-four, with dark hair and quite pretty. She looked like a *poule*. The man went by me and out the front door, paying me no attention. The girl still stood there with the door open. She was looking at me. I glanced out and saw that the gendarme was coming to my building. I walked quickly to her.

'*Bonsoir, madame,*' I said, '*Est-ce que vous m'attendez?*'

She smiled at me and nodded. '*Peut-être, monsieur.*' Then she invited me in, to make sure. She had a single room with a small bathroom and a smaller kitchen. There was an unmade bed in a corner, unwashed dishes in the kitchen, clothing and souvenirs of a drab life strewn everywhere. She had an untidy house and an unreceptive mind, and it took five thousand francs to convince her that I didn't want to make love to her; that I just wanted to sit quietly with her for a little while. Well, of course she couldn't understand that—she had not heard the roof battle—and she asked me very seriously whether I was a *pederaste*. I told her no, but she insisted that she would go out and find a boy for me if I would give her another three thousand francs.

She was very much disappointed that I ~~was~~ not interested in this proposition. Then the gendarme came knocking at the door and she opened it. He brushed by her and came a couple of steps into the room. I was lying on the bed and I turned my head to look at him. He stared at me for a moment with surprise, then pardoned himself and withdrew quickly. She closed the door after him and laughed. 'The police are sometimes very delicate,' she said. 'You see, I pay my fees regularly so they would not wish to embarrass you.'

I got up and put on my coat. I kissed her good-bye, on

the forehead, and left. The gendarme was in the hall and he nodded pleasantly to me as I walked by. I went out to the Rue St Charles and found a cab. In fifteen minutes I was home and listening to the caustic comments of Diane about my getting shot in the leg and ruining my clothes again.

The killing of Dorffman and two of the gunmen and the wounding of Gratz – he, too, had been shot in the leg – was the sensation of Paris and, in fact, of the continent. Only the truck full of gold was not mentioned. The newspapers devoted their entire front pages to the gun battle on the Rue St Charles for many days, and there was a serious discussion in the National Assembly about whether the disgraceful conditions that had made Chicago a by-word throughout the world had not finally descended upon Paris. Early editions of the newspapers carrying the story referred to a ‘tall American’ who was believed to have been involved and who was thought responsible for the ‘murder on the roof.’ But later editions dropped all reference to this American and he was never mentioned again in the press or on the radio, so far as I could find out.

On the other side of the fence, Pindar and his lieutenants vanished, Lauderbach took a trip to England, and Mme Ballu was furious. She blamed me for everything, there being no one else about upon whom to vent her anger, and she assured me that a day of reckoning would come; that I would pay for my evil ways; that I had jeopardized her entire organization and the important work it was doing.

DICA was equally upset and for much the same reasons. It was one time they saw eye to eye with Mme Ballu. They accused me of deliberately fomenting the massacre and they told me that the French Government was so outraged that they were in danger of being forced to curb their activities.

'It was Captain Burleigh speaking, and we were strolling through an exhibit of modern paintings by an *avant-garde* group at the Galerie d'Hiver.

'This is the kind of activity we cannot abide,' he declared, looking morosely at a combination of lines and curves with a fried pork chop in the middle that occupied the place of honour on a large stretch of wall. 'Once more we demand that you cease your activities – that you leave the continent immediately.'

'No,' I said, 'I'm not leaving. You made an agreement, and I insist that you stand by it.'

'This was no part of the agreement – that you would set off a gang war.'

'Pindar's boys did the shooting, to get the gold and to avenge Brandeli.'

'But you set it up!'

'Of course I set it up! I had to get rid of Gratz and Dorffman. I couldn't move around any more with them at my back. One word from them to Zilbourg and I would be dead.'

'Zilbourg? What's he got to do with it?'

'He was Gratz's contact. He *had* to be Gratz's contact, since there's been no one else on the scene with enough power who knew him.'

We strolled into another room and started our tour of the walls. Burleigh was silent for half-way round.

'You always have an answer,' he said bitterly. 'The greatest mistake we ever made was to entrust this job to you.'

We left it at that, with nothing settled except our mutual discord. There was no question that I was being stubborn, unreasonable, impossible to handle. I concede that. But if I was to do this job at all, I had to follow out my own reasoning, no matter how much it conflicted with that of others. DICA had not proved to me that it was infallible.

Chez Champe'llor things were not much better. My coming home with a gun-shot wound in my leg was bad enough. Also Diane didn't fail to point out with French practicality that I had ruined my suit. But then when the newspapers and the radio started screaming about Chicago gangsters in Paris, and particularly when those early reports mentioned the 'tall American' who had surely committed the 'murder on the roof,' Diane very quickly put a couple of two's together and got a big, fat four.

'So, Mr Chicago,' she said, 'I suppose you're very proud of yourself.'

'No,' I replied, 'I'm not proud of anything.'

'Why did you do it?'

'Well, I killed Dorffman because he was trying to kill me.'

'But you are the police, so it is all right if you go about killing people.'

'No, it isn't all right. And I'm not the police any longer, either. I've been fired. I'm kind of free-lancing.'

'Pardon?'

'I'm in business for myself. Free enterprise. I've got my own store now.'

'Yes? And what do you sell, Mr Gangster?'

'Look, Diane, lay off me. I'm no gangster. Those people who were killed were gangsters, and two of them were killed by gangsters. I was there because I had to be there, to protect a couple of people I think very highly of.'

'To protect who?'

'You and me. . . . I couldn't explain it to you, Diane, so that it would be reasonable or acceptable. I've failed to explain it to anyone else. To me it's all very clear, but apparently other people don't think the way I do.'

'Well, I don't, and I don't want to stay with you any more.'

'You don't?'

'No.

'You haven't much choice now, unless you want to make certain that I get filled full of lead.'

She put her arms around me, then, and she said, 'No, I don't want that, darling.'

'And you'll stay in this apartment? I'm going to have to go away for a few days – down South – but you'll be here when I get back?'

'Yes, I'll be here,' she said into my ear. Then she kissed me. We were in that Chancellor love nook, so I – well, never mind.

XIV

I bade Diane good-bye Friday morning early and had a brief battle with her to get her to accept a package of francs to tide her over while I was gone.

'I won't take it,' she said flatly.

'You've got to, Diane. Anything may come up. Suppose I send you a cable and tell you to fly to America? You'll need plane fare.'

'America? Are we going there?'

'Sooner or later. It could be sooner.'

'Well, in that case. . . .'

'And you won't go running away until you hear from me?'

'No,' she said, 'I'll wait for you right here.'

That's what she said, 'I'll wait for you right here' – and that's what I remembered. She didn't wait for me there, but first things first. The first thing was Mme Ballu's house on the Avenue Foch, and I arrived to find it was moving day with the amazons and the pretty little maid on the verge of hysterics. The house and all of its people were in the greatest disorder, with moving men tramping about

through the rooms, with boxes and trunks piled everywhere, and with *madame* screaming at everyone:

'It's all your doing!' she stormed at me as I reached the second floor. 'Everything bad has happened since you have come here!' She led me into her sitting-room, which still had the silk-covered chairs in place, and began cataloguing her woes. 'My niece has disappeared! She has vanished, poof! Just like that, and right in Paris! Unbelievable! Now the gangsters are shooting in the streets of the city! You have started them to shooting! You will cause us all to get killed! And my worthless brother runs away! He runs away to England, mind you, right when I need him most! And you – you arrange for me to fly in an aeroplane to Marseilles this morning! Do you know what day this is, young man?'

'Yes, Mme Ballu, it is August 27.' I could have pointed out that I had had nothing to do with arranging the flight to Marseilles – that it was all her own doing – but it seemed no time for reason.

'It is *Friday*, August 27,' she shouted. 'Friday, mind you! Do you know what the book says about Friday, August 27?'

'No, m'am,' I said.

'You wouldn't, of course!' she said scornfully. She grabbed her thick astrological volume from the table, opened it to a marked page, and read in a scathing voice, "... The omens are particularly unfriendly this day in the forenoon, and especially for those born under the sign of Taurus". She glared at me. 'Taurus! I'm a Taurus!' then she resumed, "... It is advised that all sons and daughters of Taurus avoid business decisions, heavy foods, and travel". She glared up at me again. 'Travel! Do you hear that?' She continued, "... for it is impossible that any good will result. In the afternoon, the aspects" – Well, we don't have to go into that. Why did you arrange this trip for the morning?'

'We can postpone it,' I said. 'It is not a long flight and—'
'Indeed not!' she interrupted. 'I am not going to postpone anything. I am not going to dally over this business another hour! Postpone it, indeed! Hand me my coat!'

I draped the black silk wrap around her shoulders and she bounced out of the room, followed by me and a couple of amazons. She stopped in the mirrored foyer to dip into some perfume, then we went out and I helped her into the Rolls. Sasha drove us to Orly, where a neat little Armstrong-Vickers transport was waiting for us. Along the fuselage in large red letters was painted, ROYAL FRANCO-IRAQ OIL COMPANY. I helped Mme Ballu up the ladder into the plane and arranged her in one of the seats. I listened to her complaints and her criticisms and I told the pilot when he came back that he was to take off immediately, fly directly to the Marsilles airport, and taxi to the Compagnie de l'Air-Orient hangars which were on the south side of the field. Then I sat down in the seat across from Mme Ballu and I tried to talk my way out of her doghouse. It was not that there was any plan of action forming in my mind; I could anticipate nothing until I knew more about her plans and Zilbourg's plans and, above all, the plans of that mysterious X-group or X-person who was at the top of this pyramid and who, I was certain, was the one who would make all the decisions. But whatever these decisions, I thought I might need Mme Ballu's support. If she were to dispense with me now that I had obtained for her the Boving and the helicopter, I would be left away out on a limb, with all of them as well as pica sawing away on it to dump me on my head. That's what I thought.

'I haven't wanted to tell you before this,' I said, 'but the reason I got Dorffman was because he was after Diane Gilbert.'

She looked at me sharply. 'What's that you say? How do you know that?'

'They were together the night I kidnapped him. I saw

them together, Diane and Dorffman. It was right after that she went down South. So, Saturday I let Dorffman go again. Sunday morning she came back up to Paris and she was grabbed at the Gare de Lyon. Those were gang boys who did that. It's just the way they'd operate - Gratz and Dorffman. So I started trailing Dorffman, and I would have gotten to Diane for you if those crazy idiots of Pindar's hadn't started shooting.'

'I don't believe it,' she said. She glared at me out of those flinty eyes, her mouth in a grim line. 'How would Dorffman ever meet Diane Gilbert?'

'Through me,' I said. 'I introduced them before I went to America for the gold. She didn't like him, but he got a terrific crush on her and I know that he was after her. I know what I'm talking about.'

She thought about that for a long time. Then she asked, 'Why did you kill him, then?'

'He jumped me, up on that roof. I tried to talk to him but he wouldn't listen to me. He was angry about my kidnapping him and he said he was going to kill me. The rest of it was an accident. Sure I was fighting him, but I was just trying to get him under control so I could make a deal with him for Diane. But he slipped and went over the side. . . . Now I don't know where she is and whether I'll ever find her.'

Suddenly, she went all soft and her eyes filled with tears. She took a handkerchief out of her bag and dabbed at them. 'It's awful!' she sobbed. 'That poor girl!' Then she sniffed a couple of times and looked over at me. 'You were right to kill him,' she said. 'However, I am not going to forgive you for the other things you have done - making me take a trip on this morning, of all mornings of the year!'

I sympathized with her and cooed over her and I had her in fair spirits by the time we were over Marseilles. At least she was talking to me civilly. So I asked her, 'You are not going back to the Avenue Foch house?'

‘But of course not,’ she said. ‘The house has been sold.’
‘Oh? I didn’t know that.’

‘How could you have known it? I didn’t tell you.’

That conversational dead-end lasted until we were on the ground. I was helping her to unfasten her seat-belt when she looked up at me and asked, ‘Do you like South America?’

‘I don’t know it very well,’ I replied. ‘I’ve been to Chile, that’s all.’

‘You’ve never been to Madura?’

‘No m’am.’

‘I think you should come to Madura with me,’ she said. ‘I will have Pindar send all of your things.’

‘I couldn’t possibly leave France now,’ I replied.

‘You couldn’t?’ she said. ‘We’ll see about that.’

We started out and I didn’t get a chance to discuss it further with her. The pilot had taxied us to the huge Air-Orient hangar and the ground crew pushed a ladder up to the side of the plane. I helped Mme Ballu to the ground and found a welcoming committee of two familiar faces and one stranger. The familiar ones were Georges Hannakin and his *maquereau* side-kick whom I’d seen on the *terrasse* of the Solferino Café on the Canebière at the very beginning of this violent adventure. The third was introduced as Cassegrain, another small, dark man of the same type as the *maquereau*. All of them had one thing in common that they were quick to make evident. They didn’t like this Connie Chancellor one bit.

Hannakin gave me a baleful look as Mme Ballu chattered gaily about the flight and the sunshine and how nice it was for them to meet us – she had ordered them to and it would have been their hides if they hadn’t – and he refused to shake my hand. The *maquereau* was equally unfriendly. Cassegrain stuck out a limp, damp paw and gave me the minimum. Then Mme Ballu announced ‘Now we will see the helicopter.’

I'd spotted it in a corner of the Air-Orient hangar as we approached from the plane and I led our party to it. There was a man sleeping in the plexi-glassed greenhouse and I opened the door and climbed in, shaking him awake. He was Rube Dickinson, our pilot, but I came very near not recognizing him from the photo DICA had sent me. He needed a shave and his eyes were the colour of a three-day drunk.

'I'm Chancellor,' I told him. 'Come to life, pal, we have work to do.'

'Roger dodger. Glad to meet you.' He looked around at Mme Ballu and the three stooges. 'That crazy-looking dame the Boss?'

'Yeah, Mme Ballu. Look, buster, gather yourself together. Get on the ball.'

'Oh, I'm all right. This is just an act. Had to disguise myself as a fly-boy. . . . Lead the way, Geronimo.'

We got out of the 'copter and I introduced him to Mme Ballu. She looked at him with suspicion and distaste, then turned her back on him, took my arm, and led me a few steps away. 'I don't like his looks,' she said. 'Are you sure he can fly that thing?'

'Best pilot in the business,' I assured her. 'He looks fine when he's cleaned up.'

'We've got no time for that,' she said. 'I want him to go immediately in his machine to our farm near Aubagne, on the other side of Marscilles.' She called Cassegrain over to us and asked him, 'Have you the maps?'

Cassegrain said he would get them and started towards a car parked at the side of the hangar. Mme Ballu said, 'You go with the helicopter and supervise everything. There are a lot of packages that are to be transported here. They are very valuable packages and I want you to keep a careful count of them and make certain none is missing. I am going to hold you responsible. Have you got a gun?'

'No, Mme Ballu.'

'You must have a gun.' Cassegrain came back with a large envelope in his hand and gave it to her. She told him, 'Give Mr Chancellor your gun.'

He looked at her uncertainly. 'I—I can't do that,' he said.

She stamped her foot. 'Do as I say!' she ordered. 'How dare you!'

He unlimbered a .45 from a shoulder holster and handed it to me. Then he dug in his pocket and handed me an extra clip of bullets. I checked the clip in the gun, then put it in my pocket.

'Now I am unarmed,' he said unhappily.

'You'll get another,' said Mme Ballu. 'You stay here. Have those other two accompany Mr Chancellor in the machine and show him the farm. I want no slip-ups. I want no mistakes, do you understand? Mr Chancellor is responsible. You do what he says.'

She turned away from him abruptly and took my arm again, moving me a few steps farther. She handed me the envelope with the maps. 'All the information you need is in here,' she said. 'Go to this place that is marked on the map with the machine and bring out the packages. My brother will be here this afternoon and a little later *Monsieur* Zilbourg will come. I will go to the Hotel Continental now. I want someone to phone me when the big plane comes in from America.'

'It should be here soon,' I said. 'They left last night.'

'Have the people unload it the minute it gets in. We will want it ready to fly again as soon as possible.'

'To fly how far?' I asked her.

'Far enough,' she said.

I walked with her to the door of the Air-Orient offices where a uniformed chauffeur was waiting for her. He led her to an old Delahaye with a baggage rack on top that was piled high with suitcases. It looked as though Mme Ballu had prepared for a long trip, if those bags were hers.

I hunted up the Air-Orient manager with whom Royal Franco-Iraq had made arrangements for the helicopter and the Boeing. I found him in his office and I left instructions for unloading and servicing the Boeing, then went back down to the hangar and gathered Rube, Hannakin, and the *maquereau*.

I told Rube, 'These monkeys know our lingo so watch your big mouth.' We got a small tractor to haul the helicopter out of the hangar, then we all got in and Rube started the big fan going.

I sat in the co-pilot's seat beside Rube and Hannakin and his companion sat on parachute packs in the rear compartment. I took out the maps and showed Rube where we were going. There was one big air map of the area with the course and the distances clearly marked in red ink. Then there was a small, hand-drawn map showing the terrain around the farm and indicating the best place to land the helicopter.

When we were in the air, Rube asked, 'What's the pitch? Why a helicopter?'

'There's some cargo to haul,' I said. 'Maybe they can't get a truck in there – I don't know. Maybe our people have all the roads around Marseilles blockaded. Your guess is as good as mine.'

'What kind of cargo?'

'That's the mystery. I don't figure it yet. I keep hunting around for an answer. The only obvious one I can't accept.'

'What's the obvious one?'

'That this is all the dough. That this is the big pay-off. That we load the Boeing as soon as it gets in and take off for Madura. *Fini*.'

'I don't follow you,' he said. 'I got a very sketchy story in London – nothing specific.'

'You fly the machine,' I said. 'The less you know, the more you're going to enjoy the upper atmosphere.'

We were over Aubagne in about fifteen minutes. There

was a road there that went south to join the coast road and we followed that for a couple of miles, then turned east again between twin-hills that were marked on the map as the 'Deux Mamelles' and which Rube had no trouble spotting. Hannakin came forward and pointed up ahead and off to the left.

'The farm is just over there,' he said.

Then I saw why they needed the helicopter. We were flying over a small, heavily-wooded valley, or draw, with a fast-flowing stream at its bottom and a road following the stream and crossing it several times. A quarter of a mile in there was an old stone bridge that had collapsed into the stream, blocking all egress from the upper valley. I told Rube to circle the bridge and I got a good look at it. The valley at that point was no more than a narrow pass, with steep sides of bare rock, and the collapse of the bridge had left an engineering problem that would have taken a year to solve.

'Why you fly this way?' asked Hannakin petulantly. 'The farm is over there.'

'When did the bridge collapse?' I asked him.

But he wasn't talking to me. He ignored me. He gave Rube directions to the landing place not far beyond the bridge and I checked them with the hand-drawn map. We came down at the open end of a U-shaped building on the side of a gentle slope. Small and rocky fields spread up-valley from it on both sides of the stream, which was lazy-flowing in this level area. The farmhouse was of two stories and built of stone. The two arms of the U were the barns and storerooms and the cross-building was the house. There was a large stone well and a huge chestnut tree in the centre of the courtyard.

Two men with Schmeiser guns, had come into the courtyard as we came down and they stood watching as we four got out of the helicopter. Hannakin and the *maquereau* went up to them and talked to them. I told

Rube, 'I'll get them to load the 'copter. We got back as soon as possible.'

I joined the four and we went to the building on the left. One of the guards swung back a huge wooden door, revealing a room the length and breadth of the building. It was piled almost to the rafters with square, paper-wrapped packages, each with a large black number on it. The wrapping was of heavy paper and well sealed with glue. I picked up one of the packages and examined it. It weighed about fifty pounds and there was a large blob of sealing wax where the ends of the wrapping joined, with the initial 'V' imprinted in the wax. 'V' for what? Five? Victory?

I looked up and the four were regarding me, standing in a row at the door. It was an unfriendly group. 'Start loading the plane,' I told Hannakin. 'Tell those two to put down their guns and help you. I'm in a hurry.'

There was a brief conference, then the four got to work. One of the guards handed me a four-page list of numbers, ruled in such a way that each number could be checked off in several columns, and I noted each package as it was taken out, checking its number. We had the 'copter loaded in ten minutes, then Rube and I climbed in and we took off.

We spotted the Boeing by the hangar as we came in for our landing. A crew was unloading its cargo and a gas truck was backed up to a wing, pumping gas into its tanks. We taxied over to it and Cassegrain was there to greet us. He reported that the Boeing had landed just after we had taken off, and that it would be unloaded in about an hour.

'What are you doing with that cargo?' I asked him.

'We'll have it hauled to a warehouse in Marseilles,' he said. 'We don't need it.'

'We don't? Who says so?'

'Mme Ballu. Just talked to her on the phone.'

'I'll call her,' I said, 'Have the 'copter unloaded right away. Get the men from the Boeing on it.' I handed him the list. 'Check the numbers of every one of those packages in this column. I'll be right back.'

I went into the office of the Air-Orient manager and used his phone. I got Mme Ballu after a short wait and reported the arrival of the Boeing and our return from the farm. She was off in her private dreamland and wasn't having anything to do with business.'

She said, 'Connie, do you realize that Venus comes into ascendancy in just a few hours?'

'No,' I said, 'I hadn't been thinking about it, Mme Ballu.'

'Well, you'd better, young man. You'd better make up your mind what you're going to do. You have two choices, but if you think *I'm* going to influence you, you're mistaken!'

'No, I didn't expect you to. . . . Do you want to hear about the Boeing and the helicopter?'

'What have they got to do with it?'

'A good question,' I said. 'Well, I—'

'You let me know what you decide,' she cut me off. Then she hung up, and that was that.

When we got back from the third trip to the farm, Lauderbach walked towards us from the Boeing. He was wearing his usual tall hat and muffler, although it was hot enough there to fry a phoenix.

I introduced Rube to Lauderbach, but Adolph wasn't in a sociable mood. He turned away from him and said to me, 'I suppose you feel proud of yourself for all those killings in Paris.'

'No, sir,' I said.

'You're a trouble-maker, Chancellor. Now my sister tells me she is taking you to Madura with us.'

'I won't be able to go,' I replied.

'You think not?' he asked. 'We'll see about that. How many more trips to the farm will you have to make?'

'Eight or nine. Not more than that?'

'How long will that take?'

I looked at my watch. It was 3:30. 'We'll have all the packages here by midnight,' I said.

'See that you do,' he barked at me. He gave me a mean look, then walked abruptly away towards the hangar offices.

The Boeing was unloaded by then and the packages we had brought were being stowed inside. Cassegrain got the crew to transfer our new load to the Boeing and I checked off the numbers of each package. Also I counted those in the plane, just to make sure. None was missing. While I was inside, I had a look around. There was a washroom in the tail compartment. Forward of that was a storage space, and it was now piled high with baggage on one side. On the other was a stack of a dozen parachutes. The four double seats were between this compartment and the door of the plane. I took a look up front, walking in the narrow aisle between the stacked packages, and saw a score more bags stowed behind the pilot's compartment.

So it all added up. This was all of the money we were loading on the Boeing. All of the billions. It had been printed and packaged and was ready to be transported long before we had sent the plane off to New Jersey to bring back paper and ink. Now the baggage was aboard and probably in a matter of hours the party would assemble and the plane would take off for Madura, with Hilary Zilbourg and Lauderbach and Minc Ballu and at least one other, the mysterious Mr Big – the brain who had conceived it all and who was now executing his conception. . . . But was there a Mr Big? Was DICA right, I wrong? Had I jeopardized all chance of wrecking this conspiracy by demanding those extra days to continue my hunt?

I still believed I was right. There had to be this key man and I had to continue the search I had started. I'd gone

too far to give it up, just because the end seemed to be closing in too fast. If I listened to the panic that was beginning to surge close to the surface and called in DICA now, then we would be exactly where we had been before, when I had refused to allow them to act. We would have gotten Mme Ballu and Lauderbach and Hilary Zilbourg and these other minor hoodlums, but we still would have missed our only important quarry. I had committed myself and I had to go through with it. And yet, there was that other part of my mind that was screaming for me to run to cover while there was still time; to abandon this insane activity that could lead only to my destruction.

If I'd had any sense, I would have listened to these warnings. I would have sent an emergency call to D-Section right then and asked them to come and fish me out of the soup. But I didn't. Instead I worked my back off getting all of their counterfeit wealth from the farm to the airport and stowed in the Boeing. And I spent my spare time wondering about various small mysteries, such as why the Boeing had been sent to New Jersey to pick up paper and ink that was not going to be used.

XV

It was a few minutes before midnight when we landed in the 'copter at the airport with the last load of packages from the farm, along with Hannakin, the *maquereau*, and the two guards. Hilary Zilbourg had arrived in a private plane from Biarritz and had established himself in the office of the Air-Orient manager. Lauderbach was with him and the two of them had a spread of chicken and champagne icing in coolers when I went up to report.

'We've just brought in the last of the packages,' I said.

Zilbourg leaned back in his chair. 'That's fine, Chan-

cellor,' he said. He looked at his watch. 'I suppose we'll have the plane all loaded around twelve-thirty, eh?'

'Everything will be ready by then. However, there seems to be one package missing. Cassegrain has the list, but there is no sign of Package No. 1. It was not at the farm.'

'It's not missing,' he said. 'It will be along later.'

'Who will bring it? As long as I'm responsible, I'd like to know.'

'It'll be along,' he said, waving his hand at me.

'Yes, sir,' I said.

'Mme Ballu wanted you to come with us,' he said.

'Yes, she asked me. I can't do that very well.'

'Why not?'

'Well, I've made no arrangements. . . . I can't leave Paris now.'

'You can't, eh? Pindar will make the arrangements. I've already talked to him.'

'It would be inconvenient,' I said.

'Never mind that, Chancellor. You're working for me now. I'm giving the orders. Get into the plane and wait for us.'

I was dismissed with that and I went back down to the hangar and was on my way to the plane when all of a sudden something struck me like a load of rock being dumped on my head. Zilbourg had talked to Pindar. Zilbourg had told him to make 'arrangements' for my absence from Paris. What arrangements? To go to my apartment and pack up my clothes and send them to me? Pindar in my apartment!

There was a phone booth in the corner of the hangar and I ducked into it and dialled the long distance operator. I asked her for my number in Paris and stood there jittering for five minutes that seemed like five hours before the call was completed and I heard the buzz of my phone ringing at the other end. It rang and it rang and my heart sank lower and lower. Then the operator cut in to tell me that

the number didn't answer I asked her for the Invalides number of DICA and I got the operator there quickly I gave him a message

'Geneva,' I said 'Tell Belgrade that Pindar's got Diane Tell Belgrade to get her right away'

I stood outside the booth and lit a cigarette There was only one thing to do, go up to Paris and tear Pindar apart Maybe DICA would find Diane, maybe they wouldn't How could I trust them when they'd been so careless about so many other things? When they'd been so careless about Judy? I could call them back and tell them to come and get the Boeing They'd have three quarters of an hour to get a squad of cops over from Marseilles, and if they timed it right maybe they'd catch Mr Big just as well as I could Better, even The chances would all be in their favour, instead of stacked against them as they were against me What could I hope to accomplish alone against these people? Diane put an entirely different light on everything I turned to re-enter the phone booth and saw Cassegram and the two guards from the farm coming towards me The guards were still carrying their Schmeiser guns, which struck me as a silly risk around the Air-Orient hangar They would surely bring the police down on their heads any minute

I was going to say something about that when the trio stopped and the guards brought up their guns to point at me Cassegram said, 'Come on, Chancellor, let's get into the plane'

'What is this?' I demanded 'Tell those men to get rid of those guns immediately You want the police over here?'

He sneered at me 'Save your breath Give me my gun'

He came nearer, but not too near, and held out his hand I took the .45 out of my pocket I made a lightning calculation of the chances and figured I'd get two of them before they got me But what would be the point of that? I handed him my gun He took it, then motioned me with

it to precede him. The four of us walked to the Boeing and I climbed in. One of the guards came up after me and told me to sit in the first seat opposite the door. I sat. He stood by the door with his Schmeiser held easy and ready.

The last of the packages from the 'copter were brought in, but by our own men and not the ground crew. Then the load was braced with boards and lashed down with cables, under the direction of Cassegrain. None of them talked to me.

At 12:40 Mme Ballu arrived. She was assisted into the plane by Cassegrain. She nodded to me, then arranged herself in the seat behind me. A half a dozen more bags – hers, I presumed – were brought in and stowed in the compartment behind the seats. Then she tapped me on the shoulder.

'What did you decide?' she asked.

I turned around to her. 'Decide?'

'Yes, I told you,' she said impatiently. 'You have two choices. Which have you decided upon?'

'Oh, Venus! . . . Well, I decided on the heart, but that didn't seem to work out at all. So I've had to abandon that.'

'Good,' she said. 'You are wise. Is that man guarding you?' She pointed a finger to the guard at the door.

'Yes. Would you mind telling me why?'

'I don't know,' she replied. 'Those were the orders. . . . What have you done now? You're always getting yourself into trouble.'

I shrugged at her. 'I've no idea. Maybe Mr Zilbourg wants to be certain I'm coming along.'

'The orders were not from him,' she said. 'You know, there's something very mysterious about all of this that I don't like.'

'I couldn't agree with you more,' I said.

There was suddenly the grinding of a self-starter and one of the engines coughed, then started. I looked at my watch. It was 12:47. Then a second engine was started.

The guard was looking out the door. If I dived at him at that instant, I could have gotten him and his gun easily – but what would that have gained me? While I was wondering about that, the opportunity passed. Hilary Zilbourg and Adolph Lauderbach came up the ladder. They sat in the seat across from mine. They both nodded at me but didn't speak.

Well, there seemed to be no menace there. I relaxed a bit. Everybody relaxed, even the guard. All four engines were idling, but there was no move to get under way. The door remained open and the ladder against the fuselage.

So somebody else was coming. Would these last passengers include the man I had been waiting for? Would he be the one whom Zilbourg said would 'be along' with the missing package No. 1? I had a good idea what would be in that package, but that's the only idea I had that's worth mentioning.

Then the guard at the door suddenly stood straighter and riveted his eyes on me. A head and shoulders appeared in the door and a heavy bag was swung aboard. It was Hannakin. He stood there on the ladder a moment and looked at me, then at the guard. He smiled at me, as though something pleased him very much, then suddenly disappeared.

Another head and shoulders materialized at the doorway and a large man stepped lightly into the plane. I felt a sudden lift, for this man I knew. This was someone who had come at the last moment to bring this entire murderous affair to a fitting triumphal ending. This was Arnold van der Heide of the International Criminal Investigation Authority, D-Section.

But that optimistic thought vanished immediately. It was replaced by dismay. Van der Heide stood for a moment in the doorway, glancing quickly at the cargo, then at me and the others. He nodded his head to us. He said, 'Good evening Isabella and Hilary and Adolph.' Then

his voice hardened 'And Hughey,' he said 'Glad to have you aboard'

I didn't give him the traditional response I was too stunned to say anything Van der Heide! The currency expert from DICA! Could he be the genius who had conceived and executed this whole, unbelievable plot?

Cassegrain and the other guard came into the plane Van der Heide moved away from the door and Cassegrain slid it shut, banging the latch home with his fist

Van der Heide pointed a finger at me 'Tie him up,' he told Cassegrain

The engines were revved up and the plane started to move Cassegrain ordered me, 'Stand up' I stood He produced a large roll of adhesive tape from his pocket and taped my wrists behind my back Then he told me to sit down again and he taped my ankle together

'That's good enough,' said van der Heide 'He's not going anywhere'

Cassegrain got to his feet and backed away The plane was crossing rough ground on its way to the end of the runway and the four standing held onto the cargo lashing

Mme Ballu spoke up in a shrill voice over the roar of the engines 'Arnold! Would you mind telling us what this is all about?'

He smiled at her 'This man is the police,' he said pointing to me

'The police!' she exclaimed 'how do you know that?'

'We've both been working for the police,' he said

'I don't like that Arnold,' said Zilbourg 'How did the police get into this?'

'They've been in it from the start' said van der Heide smugly 'We had to use them, Hilary - to get this plane and our helicopter, to do a thousand things for us Naturally I couldn't tell any of you about it One of you would surely have given it away The situation was much too delicate'

'You haven't trusted us!' wailed Mme Ballu.

'It's not that at all,' said van der Heide. 'I knew what was best for us.'

The plane had reached the runway and I felt it turning around. Then it stopped and the engines idled.

He turned his light blue eyes on me and looked at me speculatively. 'You've been a great help to us, Hughey,' he said. 'It's a shame we're going to have to part, once we're out over the ocean.'

'I'll miss you, too,' I said.

'You were right about one thing that our associates seemed to ignore - that there was a brain behind it all. You are very astute, Mr Hughey.'

'Someone else got on to you first,' I said.

He nodded. 'Yes, Judy Deprez. A shame about her. A very able young lady.'

I nodded to the heavy bag which was still by the door. 'Those are the plates for the money?' I asked him.

'Yes.'

'And the paper and the ink we brought from America? What was that all about?'

'To gain time, Mr Hughey. DICA had found out too much. I had to convince them the money had not yet been printed.'

'Why do you call him Mr Hughey?' demanded Mme Ballu.

'That's his name, Isabella. Wright Hughey.'

She tapped me on the shoulder. 'Spell it for me, she said.

I did. Then she let out a triumphant 'Ho!'

'I knew it!' she exclaimed. 'I knew he couldn't have been a Seven, and born at 8:30. Didn't I tell you that?' she demanded, leaning over the back of my seat excitedly and poking me with a finger. 'It just couldn't have been! And all the time you were a Three!'

Van der Heide smiled at her excitement, then turned

to Cassegrain and the guards. 'Take him in the back, with the baggage,' he said. 'You three take turns guarding him.'

'That's the way it should be,' said Mme Ballu happily. 'Three to guard a Three.'

I was dragged along the aisle between the seats by one of the guards and Cassegrain and propped up on the floor against the stack of parachutes. Van der Heide took the seat I had vacated and I heard him telling Mme Ballu that Pindar had found Diane in my apartment and that she was now safe with him at the Sicilione. Then he came back to check on me, just before the plane took off. I told him, 'You're a son of a bitch for letting that Pindar get Diane.'

Cassegrain leaned down and slapped my face hard.

I had a lot of time to think about myself and my problem. I put my mind to it and I combed the possibilities of escape. There weren't many. The stack of parachutes I was leaning against gave me the one obvious idea, but its implementation was another matter. How was I going to get loose, get into a parachute, and get out of the plane without being shot? And even if I could achieve that and save myself, then what? Let them all go? Let all of these efforts come to nothing? But survival came first, even so. I stayed awake and alert to seize any opportunity that might offer.

Cassegrain and his two companions stood hour-long watches over me. One would lean against the baggage in the tail compartment with a Schmeiser gun and the other two would be up forward - in the pilot's compartment, I imagined. There was a lot of room up there, with a couple of bunks they could sleep in. The rest of our company soon settled down to sleep in their seats, which they tipped back. I could see the top of Mme Ballu's head and a small, shining segment of Adolph's bald pate. The three men all snored and their droning was distinctly audible over that of the engines. Thus the hours passed and thus I watched and waited, my wrists and my ankles paining me from

their tight bindings and all of my limbs cramped and sore from my uncomfortable position.

It was towards the end of the fourth watch, which was Cassegrain's, when I noticed the first grey light of dawn at the portholes. I rolled around, trying to relieve some of the discomfort, and saw that Cassegrain had his eyes closed and that his head was nodding on his chest. The Schmeiser had a strap on it that was around his shoulder, or he surely would have dropped it. I was over on my side at that moment and I very slowly moved my arms down and over my hips, so that I could bring my bound wrists in front of me. It was a tight squeeze but it worked. Cassegrain half straightened up once, then subsided again. I started to gnaw on the adhesive tape and didn't mind a bit that it tasted like a drug store. I gnawed and tore at it and finally I had my hands free. I watched Cassegrain for a moment, then quietly pushed myself upright. I was right next to him. I got my two hands in position, one over his mouth and the other at his throat. Then I moved them, fast and hard. He let out one small grunt, then went limp. I'd put all I had into it, which was more than enough.

I looked quickly at the rest of the company. Mme Ballu was moving her head but the others were quiet. I ducked down, carrying Cassegrain with me. I took the Schmeiser gun from around his shoulder, then got out my knife and cut the bindings on my feet. The Schmeiser gave me another idea. With that I could do almost anything.

I opened the door of the washroom in the tail and examined the porthole, which I had remembered on my first inspection of the plane. There was something about that porthole that I thought I had noticed, but I wasn't sure. Now I verified it. There was a lettered sign there, 'EMERGENCY EXIT.' Below it in smaller printing were the instructions for using it.

I looked out and down and saw that we were flying over water. My heart sank within me. I couldn't win. Either I

would jump with a parachute and drown slowly, or I would be thrown out of the plane by my companions and be killed instantly by the great impact. But why should we be flying over water so soon if we were on our way to Madura? The most reasonable route from Marseilles would be down the African coast and across the South Atlantic at the bulge of Brazil. Then maybe we were close to the African coast. Maybe I'd have a chance. There was too little light and too much haze to see if there was any land in the offing. That's a chance I'd have to take.

I moved back into the rear compartment and looked over the four sleepers. None of them moved. I looked up ahead and the door forward was closed. I moved Cassegrain's body out of the way and carried the twelve parachute packs into the washroom. It was difficult to arrange them so I could get in myself, but I made it finally. I locked the washroom door and piled eleven of the packs into a bulwark by the emergency exit. Maybe these packs would stop any bullets that might be fired at me from inside the plane. I had a plan now, and it was inevitable that there'd be shooting, if it worked out.

The twelfth parachute pack I got into, buckling the harness tightly around my thighs and chest. Then I opened the emergency exit and jammed myself hard against its sides so that I would not be shot out of the plane by the tremendous force of the slip-stream. There was this thing I wanted to do before I left, but I had no idea whether I could or not, or whether it would work. The only way to find out was to try it.

The pull of the slip-stream was almost more than I could resist. Almost but not quite. I fought it for a moment, getting myself balanced, then I brought up the Schmeiser gun and aimed it at the outboard engine. I fired a short burst into the cowling, maybe four or five rounds. Nothing happened for a moment, then the engine slowed down and stopped. So I'd stopped it, but that wasn't at all the

dramatic effect I'd been hoping for. It was a disappointment but, better than nothing. If I could stop the other engine as easily, they'd never get to Madara.'

I aimed the gun at the inboard engine and pulled the trigger again. Four or five rounds more. The engine continued to turn over. Then I noticed out of the corner of my eye that some of the parachute packs were jumping in a peculiar way. They were shooting at me from inside the plane!

I raised the Schmeiser again and held the trigger down, spraying all around the inboard engine until there were no more bullets left in it. Suddenly I got the effect I wanted. There was a burst of flame from under the wing which sent a puff of black smoke under me, then the entire wing section was on fire.

I dropped the Schmeiser gun and relaxed my stance in the exitway. I shot out into space as though I had been projected from the mouth of a gun. I counted ten - I'd heard somewhere that that's what you do, although I couldn't remember whether it was for parachutes or hand grenades or both - then I pulled the ring of the ripcord on my chest. There was a mighty jerk at the 'chute harness and suddenly I slowed down and was floating and swinging gently out in space.

I looked around and saw that I was very close to land - that it must have been on the other side of the plane from the washroom porthole because it was plainly visible. Then I hunted for the plane and I spotted it in an unexpected direction, heading down at a steep angle towards the sea. Bright flames were coming from the wing and it was trailing a wide feather of black smoke. I thought about those people in it and how they were feeling at that moment. Then I thought about some others, about Judy Deprez, and I didn't care so much about the plane. As it neared the water, it levelled off sharply and it seemed that the pilot might still have had it under control. It turned

towards the shoreline and seemed to fly level for a moment, then suddenly it plunged into the sea, with a great splash and a final puff of smoke and steam.

It sank almost immediately. I saw part of the fuselage and the tall tail sticking up for a moment, then they were gone. I heard myself say out loud, 'Are you listening, Judy? Here they come!'

There's little left to tell about the Rue du Bac, from No. 83 at one end where Diane lived, to the Sicilione at the other. The destruction of the Boeing with its cargo and its people and their avarice was a satisfactory ending to this most sensational conspiracy. It still left Pindar, of course, but he was a local French police problem rather than any concern of the International Criminal Investigation Authority. It still left my own vows about Pindar, but the truth is that when I got back to Paris and found that Diane was safe in the hands of DICA, I had no more interest in him. I was all through 'getting' people. I'd done enough of that.

I was picked up by a native fisherman a couple of miles off the African coast north of Cape Verde after an uneventful landing in the sea from my first, and I hope last, parachute jump. The fisherman paddled me ashore to a small native village some twenty miles north of Dakar and a couple of bucks from the village accompanied me along a narrow dirt road for a mile or so to a cross-road where presently there appeared a dilapidated bus. They flagged it to a stop and I thanked them, shook their hands, and got in. I had plenty of francs in my pocket and by that time they were sufficiently dry to be passable, so I had no trouble about bus fare.

We were in Dakar in an hour of jolting driving that was much more tiring than walking. It was the season known as *l'Hivernage*, or wintering, in French West Africa, and the heat and humidity were almost beyond endurance. I was as wet as I had been in the water by the time we

reached the town. I went immediately to the American Consulate and found a sceptical countryman there who finally put through a call to Paris for me after I'd made myself so obnoxious he was ready to accede to any request to get rid of me. I got Franklin at the Invalides number and I said, 'Chancellor. How's Diane and where is she?'

'Chancellor! For God's sake, where are you?'

'Dakar. Tell me about Diane and I'll tell you a lot of things.'

'She's all right. She's up in the infirmary resting. We'll keep her there. We got her from Pindar before he'd been able to do her any harm.'

Then I gave him a fast run-down on what had happened to me and to everyone else. Both Burleigh and Delong cut in on the wire and I made a full report, leaving out nothing except one minor detail. I left out van der Heide's name until the end. Then I slapped them in the face with it.

'I was right about that master-mind idea,' I said. 'You remember our argument about that, when van der Heide supported me? Well, just before we took off for Madura, this Big Brain showed up. You know who it was? Arnold van der Heide.'

There was a long silence at the other end. Then Burleigh's voice came on.

'Chancellor?' he said.

'Yes.'

'You say van der Heide was on that plane?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, well! . . . I'll tell you what, Chancellor, why don't you come to work permanently for us?'

'Get me out of this damned Dakar first,' I said.

'Stay where you are. We'll send a plane for you.'

'O.K. Tell Diane.' *

In twenty hours and eighteen minutes I was back in Paris, riding the elevator in DIA Headquarters up to the infirmary on the top floor. Burleigh had wanted to have

an immediate meeting in his office to get all the facts on van der Heide, but I told him Diane came first. 'You still doing things your way?' he had asked, but not in a disagreeable manner at all. I told him I was and he had said I would find her in my old hospital room. When I got out of the elevator I went through Dr Grenelle's office without wasting any time on amenities and past a couple of doors I had remembered.

Diane was sitting in a chair by the window reading. She looked up when I opened the door, then jumped to her feet and was in my arms with a rush. I held her that way for a long time, her head digging into my chest. Then she backed away from me and looked me over from head to foot.

'I see you've ruined another suit,' she said. 'What did you do, go swimming in it?'

